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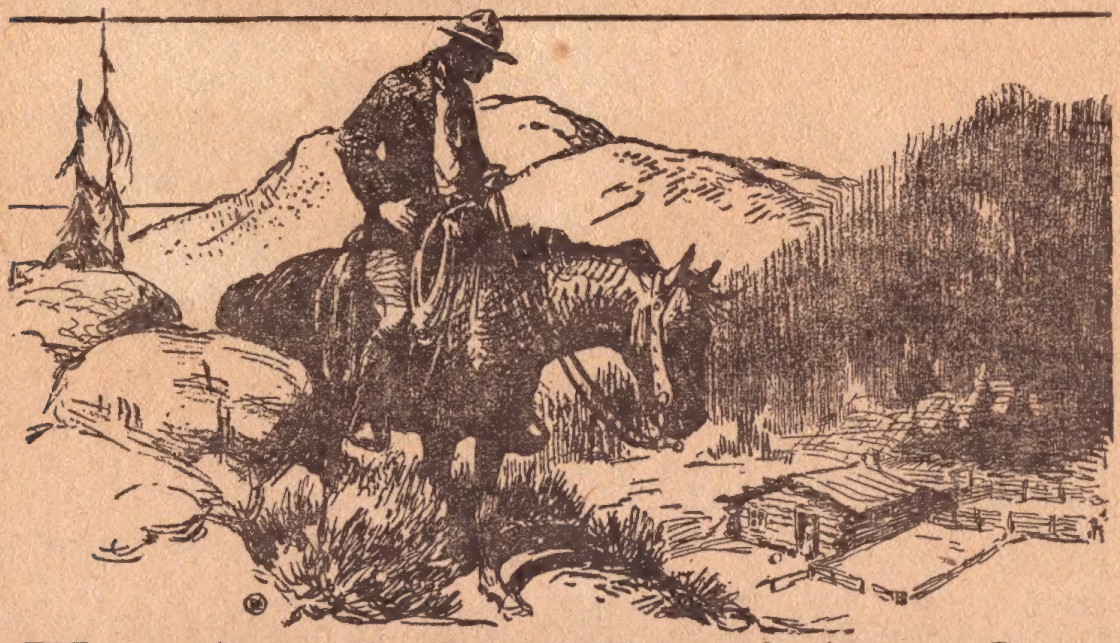


The Man He Couldn't Get

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "The Good Bad-man," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD GOOSE.

THESE are the generations of Hubert Dunleven.

In the beginning, out of a mist of Scotch and Irish, there appeared Robert Dunleven who had reason to flee from his home country to the young United States. He took to wife, Little Beaver, a full-blooded Iroquois maiden. They had a son, Edward, and Edward had reason to flee from his native State to Canada, where he took to wife Estelle, the daughter of a French-Canadian, and they had a son, Pierre. And Pierre had reason to flee from the country to the island of Jamaica, far south, where he took to wife Anne, the daughter of an English planter. Their son, Lawrence, had reason to flee from his native island to Texas where he took to wife Carmelita,

the daughter of a Spanish idler. And they begot Hubert, who had reason to flee all the days of his young life, and who got himself names, to wit: "Shorty," alias "Bunch," alias "The Duke." These are the generations of Hubert Dunleven.

Now these are the generations of John Tipton.

In the beginning from the stalwart and honest people of Devon there appeared John Tipton, who became a constable in the service of his king and country, and he was a mighty man. He took to wife Rose, the daughter of a Devon farmer near Barnstaple. Their son, John, was a mighty man, who served his king and country as a constable. He took to wife Margaret, the daughter of a Devon farmer near Barnstaple, and they begot John, who was a mighty man and served his king and country as a constable. He took to wife Elizabeth, the daughter of a Devon farmer near Barnstaple, and they begot John, who was a mighty man, and served his king and country as a constable. He took to wife Diana, the daughter of a Devon farmer near Barnstaple. Their son, John, was a mighty man, who served his king and country as a constable, and took to wife Kate, the daughter of a Devon farmer near Barnstaple. They begot John Tipton, who felt a call for the blue sea and traveled across the Atlantic and reached a new country and went to Texas, becoming a ranger in the service of the State. These are the generations of John Tipton, who was considered a mighty man.

When this John Tipton was a mere youth with the rose of Devon still in his cheeks and the love of his new country bright in his eyes, he rubbed elbows, in a crowd at a rodeo, with another no older than himself, a short fellow with a stern, ugly face, wide shoulders and long-dangling arms. The short man turned and smote the boy from Devon upon the root of the nose so that a crimson stream burst forth.

Then John Tipton, of Barnstaple and San Antone, poised his long arms and struck Hubert Dunleven to the dust, out of which Hubert rose again. They fought long, and great was the combat between them until Hubert Dunleven fixed his hands in the throat of John Tipton, and men with the butt ends of revolvers had to beat him over the head to make him loose his hold.

John Tipton came within eyeshot of death. When he was recovered, he took thought and offered himself for service with the rangers. There he studied hard how to shoot swift and straight, how to ride wild horses, how to travel far and sleep light, how to read the trail and hold his tongue and tell the truth, but not too much of it. Most of all, he labored day by day at two twin arts—boxing and wrestling. A memory and a horror was never out of his mind, of a day when a short man with wide shoulders and long arms had met with him and brought him to the verge of death with a grip of steel.

One day there were tidings of a gambling hole and a shooting fracas. The captain of the rangers sent the blue-eyed man of Devon riding to capture the slayer.

Between the root of a cliff and a winding, yellow river, frothed with white, John Tipton came on a wide-shouldered man with a dark, stern, ugly face—came suddenly on him, so that there was no time for drawing of weapons. They grappled on horseback. They fell writhing beneath the feet of the horses. A blow from the hoof of his mount stretched the fugitive senseless.

John Tipton of Barnstaple and San Antone, in the service of his conscience and his country, rode serenely into the ranger camp with a Hubert Dunleven in irons on a led horse.

That very night Dunleven slipped his

manacles, gagged and bound his guard, and rode off on a stolen horse —the horse of John Tipton, himself.

Then John Tipton rode slowly and patiently on that northern and western trail. He followed it north, and he followed it west. Many another duty and many another quest fell in between, but two years later, in an empty box car of a train that was crawling across the continental divide, Tipton found a wide-shouldered man with a dark, stern, and ugly face.

Their guns they tore from the hands of one another. They fought with the weapons that God had given them, until Tipton fell in a swoon, awakening to find the criminal gone and a brakeman leaning above him.

John Tipton waited until his wounds were healed. Then he labored patiently and steadily in drawing a revolver, in striking the distant target with his rifle, and most of all in boxing and wrestling. After that he took the trail again. More deeds were attributed to Hubert Dunleven, and he had gained the first two of his names, Shorty and Bunch, which both were derived from his physical peculiarities. Many crimes were laid up against him in the mind of the law, which forgets not, and above all in the mind of the servant of the law, John Tipton.

There were more fights over cards, fights over liquor, and wild rumors of crusades and rascality which Hubert Dunleven carried south of the Rio Grande where the skins of men were as swarthy as his own, and their eyes and hair as black. There were dead men upon those southern trails of Dunleven, but only ghostly rumors came back to the ear of John Tipton.

At last the trail crossed the Rio Grande again, and Tipton, like a strong eagle, struck away for the sight of Hubert Dunleven. Still another long year followed; the trail was often lost. Often it was caught again and followed by foot, by horse, by boat, by train, until at last on a raft that sagged slowly down the current of the Mississippi, the two men met and fought again, fist to fist, and grip to grip, until a long-driven right crashed fairly home upon the jaw of Hubert Dunleven, dropping him upon his back, to rise no more for the battle.

Again John Tipton brought his captive into the hands of the law. This time he reached the jail and stood his trial. Murder, the district attorney pitched upon very awkwardly. There were plenty of other strings to the bow. There were twenty other charged crimes that might have been used to keep Dunlevan behind the bars for half a dozen lifetimes. When it came to murder—well, it was proved in the court room that Hubert Dunleven had formed the invariable habit of standing to his enemies and meeting them face to face. If they used bare hands, he used bare hands also. If they caught up a cudgel, he selected another. If they would try the edge of the cruel knife, he was one with them, and if they reached for guns —they died!

Manslaughter, or some such vague matter, it might be called. But murder? Not in the State of Texas!

That was the district attorney's mistake, and he saw twelve good men and true of the State stand up and declare the prisoner not guilty. It threw the district attorney into such a passion that he forgot to have Hubert Dunleven arrested on another charge before he left the court room. Therefore the wild goose took wing again.

Another year or more, then, before John Tipton was on the trail. For eighteen months he followed it. Much, much had happened in the two and a half years before he met Dunleven again. Dunleven had risen to a higher station in the world of crime. Somewhere south of the Rio Grande he had met a lady, men said. But whether or

not it was all feminine influence, no one could tell. Only it was known that when he reappeared in the northland, his appearance and his manners had undergone a change.

Somewhere in the south he acquired a sudden polish. Book knowledge he had always had, or enough of it to do him. Now he was no longer the abysmal brute. He dressed almost fastidiously. He had learned everything, except how to smile. Even his crimes took on a different nature. He appeared as a promoter in Manhattan. Sundry rich gulls subscribed to his schemes, and he slipped away from New York with a heavier wallet, and his third and last nickname: The Duke.

On the trail of The Duke rode John Tipton, his cheeks still bright with Devon roses. Miles by thousands lay behind him before he encountered the archenemy, head to head, as their two horses turned a narrow angle in a bridle path. They flung themselves at one another in silent fury.

The fists of John Tipton never drove harder or faster, and his arms and shoulders were never so heavy—but he could not beat down that shifting, springing form. His power ebbed. A bone-crushing blow on the side of the head made his knees sag. He tried to fall into a clinch, and a lifting uppercut dumped him into a thousand leagues of darkness.

When he recovered his wits, he found that his feet and his hands were free. His guns, his wallet, and his papers were all in the possession of the wide-shouldered, stern-faced man who sat above him on horseback and looked calmly down upon him.

"Now," said Hubert Dunleven, "take a good look at me, Tipton, because if you have good sense, this is the last time that you'll ever lay eyes on me. Remember that, John. If you have any doubt about me being the better man, stand up and we'll fight it out again!"

CHAPTER II.

A MISTAKE.

NOW, of all the honest fighting stock in the world, there are few better than the British bulldog. Among them there is no truer battler than your Devon man. He fights partly because he loves fighting, and he fights usually to the death, because he dreads death less than the shame of defeat.

John Tipton, sitting up half-groggy from the effects of the terrible blow that had floored him, had the light of battle glinting back in his eyes at once. He felt, in his heart of hearts that for all his skill, and for all his superior poundage, he had neither craft nor power to meet the sinewy might of those long arms and those wide shoulders. If he were a bulldog, yonder was a terrier, just as pugnacious, just as aggressive, just as valiant to the bitter end, and in addition, cruelly fast of hand and foot.

Notwithstanding that he felt he could not match this fellow, it never so much as occurred to John Tipton that he should give up the fight. As he set his jaw, an exquisite pang shot through his face and burned against his brain.

His jaw had been broken by that last terrible blow. The agony made him white, and he closed his eyes.

Dunleven, sitting there on his horse and watching with a savage curiosity, made the grand mistake of his life in believing that the wincing and the pallor of the larger man was caused by a sudden failing of nerve at the critical moment. Indeed, it was perhaps excusable to imagine that even a fighting Devon man could not wish to rise again to face the terrible battering of The Duke's hard fists. However, Dunleven had been trailed often enough by this old enemy. Now he should have known better—but he did not wait for a second thought. Wheeling his horse away, he rode blithely down the trail, telling him-

self that the spirit of the ranger had been broken at last. It is not the habit of Texas Rangers to have their spirits broken. They are made of a metal which may bend under stress, but which will not break.

Of all the rangers, John Tipton was the last to flinch. He made no effort to start up and call back his foe with a sharp challenge. He knew the thought that was in the brain of his enemy. After all, it was not the opinions of others that mattered to John Tipton; what counted to him was the voice of his conscience.

This day, then, went to Hubert Dunleven—but another day would come! In the meantime, there was no haste. This was merely another chapter in a story which had been spread over many years, and the word *finis* had not yet been written.

He tied a sling bandage around his face, and he rode to the nearest doctor. When he recovered, he began again with his preparations. His captain made few demands upon the time of the ranger. He knew, and the whole band knew, that John Tipton had consecrated his life cheerfully and calmly to the work of apprehending that master criminal, Dunleven. If the task were ever accomplished, it would be more than enough for Tipton, and would shed additional luster over the entire band.

Only one thing was known above all else—that Tipton would not and could not be hurried. Made as he was, of oak and iron, haste was not his way. He began again in his great labor, as though half of eternity lay before him. Behind him lay the long generations of the service of the law which was bred into his bone, just as behind Dunleven lay long generations of defiance of the law—successful defiance, because the brilliant record of the Dunlevens had never been marred by long terms spent in prison.

John Tipton was the ideal fox hound, but Dunleven was the ideal fox, with just a dash of tiger thrown in. To assist John Tipton there were all the elaborate cogs of the machine of the law. Railroads, telegraph, a thousand helping hands would carry him on his way and do his bidding. Dunleven had only himself. Perhaps the dash of tiger that was in him made it a drawn game.

Tipton, first of all, took a long trip through the mountains—to recuperate from the fatigues of long labors, read his furlough. As a matter of fact, he wanted only a chance to work up his hand with rifle and with revolver. If his back were to the wall, he would fight with bare hands. But, after the last encounter, he knew that at "rough-and-tumble" he had met his master. Therefore, he turned to guns. Practice will make perfect, and John Tipton invested three months of daily labor with rifle and Colt.

When he came down from the mountains, he was a little thinner; his lips were compressed in a tensed line. Body and brain, he was under a nerve strain from long and delicate labors. Then he picked up the tangled skein of the wanderings of Dunleven and labored for another three months before he came upon fresh traces.

That was in Arizona, where a bank's safe had been blown open—the work done with a peculiar neatness and precision which, it seemed to the ranger, were typical of Dunleven. He hastened to the spot. Yes, some one had seen, a few days before the robbery, a short, heavily built man, with a long, elastic step.

That was enough. It answered the description of Dunleven, and it raised the heart of John Tipton. He cut for sign, and on the third day he reached a hint. It carried him north and east. He took a railroad, and got to Denver.

It was a large place to spot a quarry

such as Dunleven. There was no sign of him there, and Tipton worked outward from the city. Riding wearily toward the lights of a crossroads mountain town, one evening, he came upon a little village perched at a perilous angle, as though about to slide down to ruin in the gulch beneath. He came to the hotel, and riding around toward the rear of it, he paused opposite a window.

Through that open window he had just heard a voice saying: "I'll see that and raise you another ten, sir!"

It was a curiously deep, smooth voice, with a metallic undertone in it. It stopped the ranger like a reaching hand. He reined in closer to the window, and, leaning from the saddle, he looked straight into the eyes of the archenemy.

The darkness in which the ranger stood shielded him from the observation of the other. Exactly opposite him was none other than Dunleven in the act of pushing a little stack of chips toward the center of the table.

Four other men sat around that table. They were all mountaineers of a sturdy and picturesque type—hardy adventurers, all with filled wallets. Perhaps not one of the lot had hands which were altogether clean.

This was a serious game. The chips were stacked high, and their values were great. Honest men, perhaps, never had that much money to risk on such work—not honest men who dressed as roughly as these. To a casual eye, Dunleven was the least remarkable of all the persons there. He sat boyishly short in his chair, but that gave his shoulders an almost ludicrous width in contrast with his height. His swarthy face was pale; the black eyes which the big ranger knew so well were oddly dull, as though a little film had been drawn across them.

Dunleven's hands fascinated Tipton most. He had never before, he thought, seen those hands so clearly as he did this night; he had never before had an opportunity to find their character revealed. The hair grew down a little over their backs. Those hands were very bony, long of finger, the thumbs bent back at the first joint, seemingly as strongly prehensile as the hands of a great ape.

John Tipton, watching those hands as the chips were fingered and then thrust out, felt a little quiver of apprehension pass through him. Once, in his youth, the tips of those fingers had been fixed in his throat. Tipton drew a deep breath. It was very good indeed to be still alive!

No doubt more than one man would have ridden straight up to the window and, leveling his rifle through it, have commanded the others in the room to take the fugitive from justice by the force of numbers. That was not what Tipton wanted. Mass action would satisfy the law. In this matter, Tipton felt that he had a right to make some discrimination. In a sense, he was a mere servant of the law, but in another sense, he was to be allowed to suit his own convenience.

He chose to stand, face to face, with the famous outlaw when he made that capture. Yet he hesitated to move. If he rode around to the front of the hotel and entered from that direction, perhaps it would be difficult to make an entrance into this little room, and he feared to take his glance for an instant from the face of Dunleven.

At last, Hubert Dunleven raised his head with a start; the eyes which he fixed upon the open window had a fine glint of light rising from their depths.

"Just lean back there and draw the shade across that window. 'Blondy'," said Dunleven. "There's no good reasoon why the world and his wife should watch our game, eh?"

A long arm stretched back, and the shade came down with a screech and a rattle. The ranger, perforce, turned away, and with a shiver. Of course it

was absurd to say that a man could see in the deep black of the night. But Dunleven possessed something almost as valuable as such an uncanny power—he had a guardian instinct which had warned him vaguely, subtly, that there was danger watching him from the heart of the night.

"All right, Jerry," said a big voice with a snarl in it. "Maybe that shade being drawn will change our luck. Deal again!"

"No," said the voice of Dunleven, "I've had enough!"

CHAPTER III.

A SHOT THAT TOLD.

THE ranger fled for the front of the hotel. The last announcement was enough to make him hurry; an instant more, and the grand opportunity might be lost forever.

He leaped from his mustang in front of the hotel, and as he plunged up the front steps, he saw from the corner of his eye a splendid bay mare with ample quarters, a short back, to carry weight, and a fineness of line which indicated superb speed.

Of course, he could not say that he recognized the horse of Dunleven. Yet one did not expect to find such a horse in a jerkwater mountain town. It was just such an animal as the discerning eye of Dunleven would have selected, and such as the ample purse of Dunleven would have afforded.

This was the detail that he jotted down in his inner consciousness as he hurried into the hotel.

"Hello!!" said the proprietor, heaving himself up with a suspicious face from behind his newspaper. "Hello," said he, passing a thumb under his single suspender and scowling at the hurrying form of the ranger, "what you might be wanting, stranger?"

Fellows of that type never liked Big Tipton. There was something about the man of the law that looked so well-washed, both body and soul, that it put crafty rascals and greasy villains out of sorts with themselves.

"I want Jerry, and I want him in a hurry," said the ranger.

"You want Jerry, do you?" asked the proprietor. "Oh, maybe you're his cousin?"

"Has he got a cousin?" asked John Tipton carelessly. "I don't know anything about that. I know that I want Jerry—will you show me where he is?"

"Humph," said the proprietor, "you talk as if you might know him, after all. Where would you *expect* to find him?"

"That depends," said Tipton. "But if there's a card game running in this place, he'll probably be there."

At that, the brows of the other raised, and he grinned broadly.

"I guess you're all right," he said. "I'll take a chance on you, stranger!"

He hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "Go down the hall, yonder, and knock at the last door, straight ahead of you."

John Tipton strode down the hall, conscious of the comfortable weight of the Colt at his hip. As he walked, he made a sort of silent prayer that this might be the last battle of all; that out of it he might either secure the criminal, dead or alive, or leave his own dead body to mark the end of the fray.

When he came before the indicated door, he heard angry voices declaring: "You've made your clean-up, and now you want to draw out on us!"

To which the calm, steady voice of Dunleven made answer: "I warned you before I sat in at the game that I would leave when I felt like it, whether I were ahead or behind."

"Sure," said another, "we never figured that a white man would want to pull out when he had most of the cash in his pocket! Nobody never heard of a thing like that! If you want to beat it, put the money back in the game!"

John Tipton braced himself a little. At this point he expected a crash and an exceedingly loud one. In the old days, that tigerish Dunlevan would never have endured such talk from any man. However, it seemed that the new Dunleven was able to endure a great deal.

He merely said after a quiet moment: "I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll stake every penny that I've taken from the game on one roll of the dice. Does that sound to you?"

A moment of silence followed this daring proposal.

"Speak up," said Hubert Dunleven. "Time means a great deal to me, just now. I can't waste it standing here while you whisper together. Do you want to pool the coin and shake dice for the whole of it?"

Tipton felt a chill rising in his blood. By what uncanny powers of intuition had the big man been able to guess that a vital danger was approaching him? It seemed so sure an intuition that he would have been gone before this if these companions had not detained him.

"We'll let the game go on," answered one of the other gamblers sullenly. "We ain't been playing a dice game, and we ain't gunna turn it into a dice game now! Poker is the thing, stranger, and you're gunna sit down for another couple of hours until this here game has had a fair and square chance to work itself out.

"Very well," said Dunleven quietly, "if that's the way you feel about it—I'll have to make a change——"

In spite of that quietness, he must have been preparing for swift and violent action. There was a sudden outbreak of turmoil in the room; something crashed. The rim of light around the room went out as the lamp was extinguished. Immediately, through the dark which must have flooded the card room came a cry.

"Guard the door! Watch the door, boys! He's got to get out that way!" some one was shouting.

There came a sudden tinkling sound of breaking glass.

"The window!"

Tipton had guessed that before and had stood in a quandary. He wrenched the door open in time to see, against the dim stars beyond, a crowd of men lurching for the window, and shooting through it.

A good general, in time of doubt, will strike at the communications of an enemy into contact with whom he cannot come. Tipton whirled about without a word, and raced down the hall and through the lobby, where all was commotion.

"Stop that tall gent!" yelled the proprietor. "The shooting started after he went down there—he's been gunning for Jerry, and most likely he's killed him. Hold up, big fellow, or we'll fill you full of lead! Dive for him, boys!"

Three or four sturdy cow-punchers flung themselves in a flying wedge at Tipton. A pile-driving blow with his long right broke the point off that wedge and a hammering left stunned the second man, dropping him in his tracks. The third combatant grappled hard with big Tipton, but the ranger picked him up as though he had been a child and flung him at the proprietor.

This delay had been only a matter of seconds, leaving the floor of the little lobby strewn with writhing, groaning, cursing men. Tipton lurched for the door and reached it—in time to see an active form leap to the saddle on the bay and dart off into the night.

There was not much time. From the front of the hotel, a dim battery of lights played into the darkness. Tipton had that brief distance of light in which to snatch out his Colt and fire—while the bay mare was leaping like a racer for the margin of blackness and of safety.

He made that snap shot with speed

and precision. Even as he pulled the trigger, he knew that it was a hit. He saw the form of Dunleven sag forward upon the neck of the horse.

He himself was instantly in the saddle upon his own mount—but he had ridden far in that day, and his weight was a crushing load upon all except born weight carriers. The bay drew easily and swiftly away from him, and he was pumping lead vainly, after a dancing shadow.

Others rode behind him, but they had started too late, and they were soon discouraged.

Though outdistanced, Tipton did not surrender. If he could not win by actual speed, he felt that he would be able to keep within striking distance—and he had before him a wounded man. Loss of blood would tell, in a long race.

The ranger drew back his horse to a steady canter. The road was muffled with inches of velvet dust. There was only a dulled thrumming of the hoofs, and the sound of the water, which the horse had drunk at the hotel trough, rumbling up and down in his belly. He grunted a little with almost every stride. Certainly this night work was not to the taste of the mustang, but Tipton was without mercy. Ahead of him he felt the goal of his labors lay ready at his hand!

The moon rose; as he came to the crest of a gentle rise, he saw a long, long stretch of the valley road gleaming for white miles before him, until it drove away out of view in the moon mist. There was no sign of a horseman along its course.

Tipton drew rein and looked thoughtfully around him. He was both pleased and sorry.

He was pleased, of course, because this was the surest token he could have asked, that the wound of the bandit was deep and serious. Otherwise, with such a fleet horse beneath him, gaining with every stride that it took, what more could Dunleven have asked than such a straight road as this to carry him far, far away from his enemy?

No, Dunleven, badly hurt, had turned from the road to give his hurt the proper care. Perhaps he would even have become so weak that it would be necessary for him to rest for long hours. At any rate, this was the first victorious point for the ranger. The difficulty that went along with it, was that all around him there was a tangle of big trees, and little lanes cut off through these trees, hither and yon—bridle paths leading to mountain trails, or blind alleys pointed straight at some farmhouse, perhaps.

And there was only the night in which to search this wilderness!

No doubt few men would even have dreamed of attempting such work at such a time. They would have ridden posthaste back to the town. They would have raised an alarm, gathered a crowd, and swept the countryside. Tipton had no confidence in mass proceedings. The larger the net, the greater the interstices, he had noted over and over again.

Beginning at the point where he had lost view of the fugitive, he began quietly to cut for sign.

CHAPTER IV.

A CUT FINGER.

HE came, at length, upon a glimmering of light far before him, as he rode in circles of increasing size, with a dying hope in his heart. That single ray of light was rose-colored, at first. As he drew near, it appeared and disappeared before him, with every rise and fall of the ground over which he was traveling. When the sifting tree trunks intervened, it winked like an uneasy star.

At length, the ranger came out in front of a little cabin, with the kitchen door open, and the lamplight streaming far off among the forest trees. He

circled that cabin, front and back. He stalked to a window and looked in on a girl of twenty or so very busy in the washing of dishes, singing softly at her work. The air was fragrant with the perfume of food. Suddenly John Tipton realized that he had not eaten since the early morning. Besides, it was clear that a girl would not be singing idly and happily in the kitchen, if a dreaded desperado, a wounded man, were in the house.

Tipton went boldly up to the kitchen door and tapped on it. "Hello," said he.

The girl whirled like one shot through the heart.

"What! What!" said John Tipton, taking off his hat. "Did I frighten you?"

"Not a bit," answered the girl.

She tried to smile, but made rather a bad job of it. It occurred to Tipton that that door had been left open to signal the way to some other person, and perhaps that was the reason that the girl was so frightened. He nodded at her as reassuringly as he could.

"If you're alone here," said he, "I don't want to bother you. Only I'd like to get a bite to eat, if I may, and then I'll jog on."

Here his eye passed to the table. It was cleared of the dishes with which it had been covered, with the exception of two cups and two saucers. The girl saw the direction of his glance.

"My father lives here with me," said she. "He's stepped out for a mite, but he'll be back again directly. And supper—of course, you can have that!"

She tried to make it hearty, but it seemed to Tipton that she was only able to bring out the words with an effort. Hospitality she dared not refuse to him. To refuse food to the hungry is a crime in every frontier land, and in the mountain-desert more than in all other places.

However, he did not pause to consider in detail everything that she was saying, and the inferences which might be gathered from the tone of her speech. What was of importance was that the girl had a father. Therefore, since she was not alone, Tipton could spend the night on the place. That was what he wanted; he was very tired. He looked forward with dread to the thought of rambling on through the cold and the damps of the open air, and finally making himself an outdoor camp.

Therefore, while the major half of the invitation remained unspoken, he smiled and nodded at her again. "All right," said he, "if you're expecting your father back, I'll just put up my horse in the shed, yonder, and be right in. Don't bother about fixing up a fancy feed for me. Cold pone and a slice of bacon and a cup of coffee will be fine."

With another smile, he stepped off to lead his horse toward the shed. He remembered then, that it would be an excellent thing to give his tired mount a feed of grain, if that were possible. He stepped back to the door to ask the girl if there were either oats or barley.

What he saw made a stir of suspicion rise in the mind of Tipton. The girl was standing in the middle of the floor, making no movement to prepare his lunch for him. With head raised, she was staring at the trap that opened in the middle of the ceiling above her head. The ladder which was used to reach it lay, flatling, along one side of the room.

There is not much in such a gesture and such an attitude, perhaps, but John Tipton carried with him a mind which was trained to suspicion. He and his fathers and his forefathers before them had learned, generation by generation, the old lesson—that things are often not what they seem. This tensed form of the girl, and the raised head which was directed toward the open trap, aroused an instant suspicion in him.

He turned and went slowly back toward the shed, with his question about

the grain unasked. He was in a black humor, indeed! It occurred to John Tipton that he had never before seen a girl so clear-eyed, so simple, and so gentle as she who was in the house behind him. Yet the ugly suspicion was firmly rooted in his mind that she was harboring a man in that house!

It was not for any father that she had set out the second coffee cup. Who, then? Why, when a girl was at that age, and when she had an eye so richly blue, a smile so instant and so charming, she was bound to draw young fellows about her as honey draws the bees. So thought John Tipton, remembering, with an ache of the heart, that he himself was not so very old—yet his roving life made it impossible for him to settle down and build a home!

He fell into a melancholy humor as he stripped the saddle from his horse and began to rub it down with dry wisps of hay. Of course, it was easy to see what had happened. The noise which his horse made in approaching the cabin had startled the pair. The youth had scampered up the ladder into the loft, and the girl had hastily removed that same ladder and laid it by the wall. She had barely got back to the sink where she pretended to be busying herself with the work of cleaning the dishes, when the voice of Tipton sounded at the door. The fear and excitement which he had seen in her face had these ample explanations, he felt!

Well, this was no business of his. If she chose to entangle her young life with that of a man—guiltily entangle it, perhaps—he had no right to interfere. He was no sparrow hawk to fly at such small game, but an eagle towering in pride of place to strike down mighty ill-doers. The great Dunleven was his quarry, and none other interested him.

A horse stamped on the farther side of the shed, and he stepped to the side of it. When he laid his hand upon it, the hide was wet under his touch, and a steam of pungent vapors rose from the animal. He scratched a match to take a better look at the horse, but a guttering wind, that pried through the crevices of the shed, knocked out the flame of the match, playing the same trick with still another.

He did not attempt to make a third trial. The matter did not seem of enough importance. He went back to the cabin to find that his meal was in rapid course of preparation. He sat at the little deal table at the side of the room while an enameled iron plate was placed before him.

"My name is John Tipton," said he, by way of introduction.

"I am Nell Wooster," said the girl, busy scooping quantities of brown baked beans from a great iron pot at the back of the stove.

"Hello!" exclaimed John Tipton, springing up. "What might this be?"

As he turned his head, he had seen the lamplight falling strongly upon the floor, and in that flood of light there was a scattering of little round red stains soaked into the wood.

Tipton dropped to his knees beside the spot and rubbed his thumb strongly against the place. The skin came away smudged across with red!

"Fresh! A fresh stain!" said Tipton. "What could have made this, Miss Wooster?"

He stood up and looked hard at her. She was turning toward him from the stove, with a steam of cookery blown across her busy face.

"What's wrong, Mr. Tipton?"

"I wondered what made this?" asked Tipton, fixing his sharp eye on her.

"Ah," said she, "you mean the stains on the floor?"

He nodded, and it seemed to him that she paled a little and compressed her lips. She explained:

"I gave myself a nasty cut with the butcher knife a moment ago."

She extended toward him a finger

wrapped in a twist of white cloth; the cloth was reddening rapidly from the inside, even now! It seemed very strange indeed to Tipton. His trained eye was not supposed to miss such details as this. Yet he felt that he could almost have sworn that the hands which, a little moment before, had been busy at the stove, had not been troubled by any bandage, however small. However, he was tired, and he knew that a tired mind and a tired eye are rarely accurate.

He asked her to let him see it, for a vague suspicion had formed in his mind. She was ready enough, however, at that. Unwinding the bandage, she showed him a deep incision in her forefinger, with the crimson fluid springing readily up from the lips of the cut, the instant that the bandage was removed. The suspicion died away in the mind of the ranger.

He showed his skill in making a new bandage with neat, narrow strips, and so winding them that the flow stopped, and yet circulation was not checked. After that, he was seated at the table, and the food was heaped high upon his plate.

Who can keep suspicion of the very hand that serves at the table? Not a man as hungry at John Tipton, no matter how keen his native good sense might be. He ate, and he drank. Comfortable warmth flowed into his body, and comfortable warmth flowed into his heart. A veil was brushed suddenly from his eyes, and he saw in Nell Wooster a character indeed above suspicion, and a brown-skinned beauty such as he had never seen before in all his days!

CHAPTER V.

"IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE——"

AS Tipton started on a thick, handsome wedge of pumpkin pie, Nell Wooster left the cottage with a pail in her hand, bound for the well, she told him. He would have taken the pail from her to run this errand, but she put it resolutely behind her and shook her head. He could never find it in the dark; there were so many rocks and roots and shrubs to stumble over!

He saw her vanish through the doorway into the black of the night, and heard the faint creaking of the pail handle as she went swinging down the path. The heart of the ranger went strongly after her. He forgot his food —but only for a moment.

The rest of the pumpkin pie disappeared. The coffee was swallowed, and, as John Tipton crammed the bowl of his pipe to fullness, he cast his swift and accurate eye around the cabin. First he counted the guns in the rifle rack in the farther corner, admiring the way the light glanced across their well-oiled and polished surfaces. The man of this house was obviously one who took expert care of his weapons. Such a point meant a great deal to Tipton, whose guns were like a portion of his own flesh.

Then he observed the whiteness of the floor. Nothing but many scrubbings with soap and steaming hot water could produce that color, as he very well knew. Drops of crimson might readily be lost in the general dinginess of the floor of the average mountain cabin. Against this spotless whiteness, they stood out in a bold relief. The heart of the ranger swelled with satisfaction. The daughter of no Devon farmer, even of the neat-handed housewives around Barnstaple, could have showed a more laudable and patient industry. Again a rush of warmth passed dizzily into his brain.

He tried to push the tender sentiment away from him, for he told himself that a man on a trail must never be moved by his personal affairs. All that existed of John Tipton, at this moment, should belong to the State which paid him his wages.

He surveyed the pots which ranged the section of the room around the stove. They too, had been scrubbed with sand until they shone like translucent things instead of stubborn iron and copper. Once more the woman's hand!

All that he saw were tokens to him of self-respecting and honest frontier people. Yet the old question leaped back into his mind. Why, after his coming, had the girl showed such fear and excitement? Why, when he slipped back to the door, had he found her with her head raised to inspect the trapdoor which opened upon the attic above the room?

Tipton raised his own leonine head and stared at the black rectangle. It might be nothing, and again it might be everything. To be caught in the act of investigating the house of his host would be a shameful thing. Yet—would not the creaking of the bail of the bucket give him ample warning of the approach of the girl?

He had no sooner made the decision, than a violent curiosity beat down all scruples. He picked up the ladder at the side of the room and placed it hastily in position with the top edge of the poles resting against the trap. Then he started mounting. He had not climbed two rungs when he heard a dry, quiet voice saying, behind him:

"Well, stranger, I hope that you're makin' yourself at home, here?"

He jerked his head over his shoulder, and there he saw a tall, thin, gray-haired man dressed in a tattered leather coat, with a leather hunting hat settled low above his eyes. Over his shoulder there was borne a big canvas sack, perhaps crammed with game. Most significant of all to the man up the ladder, was the fact that the new arrival carried a shotgun which was dropped into the crook of the left arm, with the right finger upon the trigger, carefully covering the ranger.

John Tipton made no mistake. He did not loiter upon the ladder; neither did he leap down in too much haste. He was more than a little red as he turned and faced the man with the shotgun.

"I don't know who you be," said the gray-headed man.

"He is John Tipton, dad," said the voice of Nell Wooster from the rear of the tall man. "And I'm sure that he's all right!"

"All right, is he?" responded Wooster. "Then what's he doing climbing the ladder to the attic?"

"Oh!" gasped out the girl. "Was he doing that?"

She stepped into the view of Tipton. There was no bucket in her hand, and the ranger felt that he could understand why that was. On the way to the well she had met her father, and she had come hastily home with him, leaving the bucket behind.

The surprise and the anger with which she was studying him now, made Tipton wince. It was not in this manner that honest folk were in the habit of regarding him.

"I heard a noise up there," said Tipton, "and I thought that I would investigate it."

The hunter smiled and nodded in sardonic agreement. "Something creaked, eh? Like a mouse or a man, perhaps?"

Tipton flushed more deeply than before. It was not the contempt of the man that he minded so much; but the open contempt in the face of the girl was a scourge to him.

"Mr. Wooster," said he, "I would like to——"

"One minute!" cried Wooster. "You just keep those hands of yours away from your hips, will you? I like you fine, stranger. But while you're in here with me, you mind your step. I ain't here to take chances with gents like you. Just hoist up those hands of yours, will you? Nell, you go through

his clothes and take any guns that he may have handy around him. This here gent looks like a mighty suspicious one to me!"

"Dad," said the girl, her eyes still fixed on the open face of the man from Devon, "are you sure that he ought to be searched?"

"Are you old enough and smart enough to know more than your dad?" asked Wooster. "Go do what I tell you to do, and hurry along about it. Tipton, mind them hands of yours!"

He had a veritable look of murder in his eyes as he spoke. Tipton raised his hands well above the level of his shoulders while the girl took away the heavy Colt at his hip. Next she located the two weapons slung next to his skin beneath his shirt. They were produced to the almost savage satisfaction of Wooster.

"We're getting down to the truth about him, now," said he. "Three guns is more than any honest man needs to wear! Tipton, you get your shoulders back against that wall and shove them hands well up above your head."

Tipton was cooler, now. There was sufficient danger here to make him forget such a petty thing as embarrassment. So he stepped back quietly until his shoulders rested against the smooth inner surface of the log wall. There he waited.

"Now," said the hunter, keeping the gun leveled at the breast of the ranger, "what you got to offer? Are you one of these here bad gun fighters or ain't you?"

"In my business," said Tipton, "we have to travel well-heeled."

"And what might that business be?" asked the other, sneering. "Are the kind of cows that you punch in your section of the range that dangerous?"

"I don't punch cows," said Tipton.

"No, you don't. And you don't work in the woods, and you don't mine, either. What's your game, young feller?"

"I'm working for the State of Texas," said Tipton, "as a ranger."

"As a what?" asked the other.

The girl understood first. "A Texas Ranger, dad! I knew that he was honest!"

"A Texas Ranger!" repeated Wooster, as the name of that famous organization came home to him. "Why, that would sort of change things, I suppose. Have you got a commission on you?"

"I have."

"Let's have a look at it."

It was passed to Wooster, and he examined it with keen attention. He refolded it and passed it back. The formidable shotgun the next instant came with a thump to the floor.

"Nell," said he, "give him back his guns. Tipton, if that's your name, I'm sorry that I mistook you. But I've got one grudge against the world, and that's a grudge at every sneaking coyote that wears more guns than he needs to bring down game. A grudge, ranger, agin' every rat that practices up ways of putting lead into the hides of honest men. Y'understand me? I come West when things was wild and woolly. I seen the bad men when they *were* bad, and I've hated and despised the lot of them ever since. But a fellow like you, Tipton, doing the business that the rangers do—why, it's like meeting a brother."

He extended a hand as hard as tanned leather, and Tipton took it willingly enough. He put away his weapons.

"As for what's in the loft," said Wooster, "you're welcome to take as long a look as you want. Go up the ladder, Tipton, though I dunno what sort of a noise that you could of heard up there!"

He turned toward the door. "I got to get in a mite of wood," he explained. "I'll be right back."

He stepped out into the night. As for Tipton, he wanted no second in-

vitation. He merely cast one apologetic look at the girl, and then he began to mount the ladder. When his hand was reaching for the topmost rung, and his head was close to the black shadow of the trap, he heard a gasping voice from the girl and turned in haste to look at her. She had clasped her hands across her breast, and her face was white.

"Don't go another step!" she whispered to him. "If you value your life, don't go another step!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE PUZZLE.

THERE was not so little imagination in the ranger that he had to ask the girl to explain her meaning. He promptly descended the ladder and, stepping as far as possible from beneath the yawning mouth of the trap above him, he stood before Nell Wooster. He came directly and suddenly to the point.

"Now, Miss Wooster, I want to know who was apt to hold a gun at my head, if you please?"

"I said nothing about a gun!" answered poor Nell, shrinking from him.

The ranger pointed over his head toward the yawning trap. "There's some one in that loft," said he, "and I won't try to make you tell me who he is. Only—we haven't given him half a chance to get away from the house. Tell me—is he a man that I'd want to see—or is it just your lover, Nell, who hid himself away when you heard my horse coming toward your house. Will you tell me what is what?"

There was still another possibility, and he was turning it slowly in his mind. The stain on the floor—the man in the loft—the perspiring horse in the shed—might they not point toward something of more importance than a mere foolish lover who hid himself away from the eye of the world, conscious of his guilt? Might these tokens not indicate that a fugitive from justice was yonder in the garret? If that were the case, of course it could be only one man—the great Dunleven, and no other man!

As the thought entered the mind of the ranger, an electric thrill passed to his very soul. It was true that the girl was pretty, and her fear was touching. Certainly, if Dunleven were hidden in the loft, her warning had saved the life of his pursuer. Yet none of these factors would have weighed for an instant with John Tipton. Even a man's sweetheart will not stand between him and his life work, if he is the right manner of man. John Tipton was distinctly the right type; the capture of Dunleven was assuredly his life work.

Just because the suspicion that it might be Dunleven entered his head, he did not for that reason come to any rash decisions. First of all, he considered the whole case with meticulous care. Dunleven was not the sort of a man who would trust himself to a woman, and particularly to a clean-eyed girl of this type. In the second place, if this girl had such a person as the famous Dunleven in her house, she would never have been able to keep a face even as well as she had done. In the third place, and what was most decisive in the opinion of the ranger, Wooster, himself, was a man who loved law and hated gun fighters. Being reared in such a school, Nell would not be apt to have much sympathy for such a reprobate as the Dunleven.

Considering all these matters through a course of seconds, John Tipton decided against pressing a search of the loft unless he got further items to arouse his suspicions. Moreover, as he faced the girl and watched her, he saw her grow a most fiery red.

"I—I don't quite understand you, Mr. Tipton," said she, growing more furiously red than ever.

John Tipton was more than two-

thirds decided, on the spot. However, he wished to make assurance doubly sure.

"I think you *do* understand!" said he. He smiled down into her eyes with his own honest blue ones—true Tipton blue, such as had looked down gun barrels through these many generations, striking terror and awe into the hearts of evil doers. "You do understand. I'm a law officer, Nell. And yonder there's a man that you're hiding. That's plain, isn't it?"

She swallowed, blinked, and faced him again. "Yes!" gasped out Nell.

"Very well, then, that fellow is either a fugitive from law, and therefore I should have him—or else he's a gentleman who doesn't care to have it known that he's—courting Nell Wooster, let's put it. Now, will you give me your word of honor that it is not a man I should see?"

"Yes," said the girl without a moment's hesitation. "Of course I'll give you my word of honor! Heavens, Mr. Tipton, what would I be doing to——"

"Very well," said Tipton, "I believe you."

And he did. She had faced him so squarely and spoken so bravely to him, that it was impossible for him to doubt her. He had not much experience with women. He was one of that type of men who feel a disquieting interest in the other sex, only when they have decided that it is time to settle down and make a home. These fellows are honorable by instinct rather than by principle, and the books can only tell them what is already firmly in their natures and their inmost souls.

The complexion of this girl appeared so pink and white, her eye so tenderly clear, and her ear—ridiculous detail!—was so absurdly rosy, like the ear of an infant, that John Tipton decided that she was the very soul of integrity.

"I believe you," said Tipton, "but this matter is so important that I want you to reinforce that word of honor by taking my hand as you tell me that the man I want is not in your house."

"Ah," said Nell Wooster, "you are after some dreadful man!"

John Tipton raised his head a little after the fashion of one who honestly does not wish to overstate. Then he said: "I'll tell you, in fact, that this is the cleverest and most daring rascal that ever rode through the mountain-desert. A short man, with heavy, wide shoulders and a long, elastic stride—you know?" He was quoting from the descriptions which were published far and wide of the outlaw. "Hubert Dunleven is the man that I want!"

"Dunleven!" gasped out the girl. "Dunleven! Oh, I've heard something about him!"

"I hope you have!" said the ranger. "If you read the papers, or if you listen to what people have to say of each other—Dunleven? Yes, I suppose that every one has heard tell of Dunleven!"

"Ay, the black scoundrel!" exclaimed the heavy voice of Mr. Wooster, as he stamped into the house again. He gave his hat and his coat to his daughter and sat down in a corner. She kneeled before him and began to unlace the high boots which he wore. From great weariness, his head fell back against the wall of the cabin; his features relaxed as he stared at the ranger, and his eye lost some of its fire.

"Ay," said he, nodding, "we've all heard something about that Dunleven, I s'pose. Though I try to keep the girl, here, from wasting her mind thinking about such things. But he's the worst of them all, is Dunleven!"

"The worst of them all?" asked the girl. "The worst of them all? But what's he done?"

"Why," said her father, "what is there for a man to do that's wrong? What is there, beginning with murder and winding up with theft and gambling and cheating devices? What is there?

Dunleven has done it all! But you should be able to talk on that theme, Tipton. Tell us what Dunleven has done! I want my girl to know one picture of a bad man!"

"I'll tell you," said Tipton, smiling faintly. "Dunleven is everything except a thief, I suppose."

"Not a thief?" cried the hunter. "Not a thief? Then I've not been able to read print right, or else the papers have lied!"

"Well," said Tipton, "if you count what he's taken when he's in flight—yes, he's a thief!"

"Little things like horses and saddles, and food and guns, and such things—that's what he's stolen, Tipton, and you know it! What of the banks that he's broken into and blown the safes open?"

"True," said Tipton, "but I was referring to sneak thievery—picking pockets, or stealing into private houses by night. Such things are beneath him; they're not dangerous enough!"

"But," asked Nell Wooster, "could one man break into a bank and—blow up the safes?"

"Ay," said Tipton, "such a man as Dunleven could, and has done more times than you have fingers and toes, Nell Wooster! My word on that!"

"Blows up the safes!" echoed the girl. "But how can he do it?"

"With nitroglycerine."

"What?" cried she. "When a single shake of the bottle might——"

"Blow him to heaven? Yes, but he uses it to blow him into a good bank account, which is another way of saying the same thing, I suppose."

"How terribly brave he must be!" said the girl, staring through the door at the blackness of the night.

"And he has done a good many other things," said the ranger. "Once he was tried for murder, but he was acquitted. There wasn't any doubt that he had killed his man, but when Dunleven does a killing, he doesn't shoot from behind. He stands up face to face. That's better. That's braver. But just the same, it is a killing. Only—out here in the West juries don't like to hang a man for what they call self-defense. Otherwise, he's killed enough white men to deserve hanging half a dozen times! And as for the Mexicans—why, no one knows all of the deviltry that he raises south of the Rio Grande. We get only echoes of it, on this side of the river from time to time!"

He smiled blandly on them! Wooster himself, breaking into a furious denunciation of his favorite theme, strode up and down the room in the soft slippers with which his daughter had equipped his feet, but Nell remained at a stand, staring through the door at the witchery of the open night, as though she were seeing new stars born into the shadow of the sky, one by one.

"Does he have no friends?" she asked at last.

"He rides too fast to gather moss," said the ranger. "And that's his strength. There are no friends to betray him."

"But how sad!" said Nell Wooster. "Oh, how very sad!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOUNDED MAN.

THAT night, big John Tipton slept in an extra bunk in the room of his host. The next morning, he took his horse and rode away. There was no sign of any animal in the horse shed or in the pasture bearing a perspiring coat, streaked with salt—such as must have been on the steaming horse which he had stood beside in the shed the night before.

He merely smiled at this. Of course, the girl had been too shrewd to let the beast remain in the shed until the arrival of her father. Her lover had slipped down from the loft during the

night, and now he rode far away through the woods, perhaps cursing the luckless arrival of a ranger which had quickly sent him into such disagreeable hiding.

In the meantime, there was work before John Tipton. His horse had been freshened by the rest and the good hay. He himself was cheered by good food and long sleep. As John Tipton reined his horse on the ridge of the next hill, he felt that he had every reason for feeling happier than ever before in his life. Here he was, fit and well and strong—and somewhere, surely, in this very neighborhood must be lying the wounded man, Dunleven.

Yet he was not gay. In spite of himself, he turned in the saddle and looked back to the little cabin of Jeremy Wooster with a pang of regret. Jeremy himself was striding away toward the woods, his game bag at his back and his rifle on his shoulder. He waved farewell cordially to the man of the law, and Tipton waved back. But the hunter was not the form in the eye of Tipton. His stare was fixed upon the form of the girl at the door of the cabin. She, too, waved, but it was a single perfunctory gesture. Tipton drew a long sigh.

If he had allowed himself the luxury of weakness, he would have become hopelessly sentimental in no time. But he ruled himself with a stern hand and allowed few of these lapses. Sentiment had to fight a stern battle and a long one, before it could gain a hold upon the ranger. Now he turned his back, squared his shoulders at the cabin, and rode slowly off down the hill.

Nell Wooster watched him go. He was barely out of view, and her father was barely lost among the shadows at the edge of the forest, when Nell had caught up the heavy ladder at the side of the room and clapped it to the trap-door in the ceiling. Up she ran, as light as a climbing cat. Then, crouched in the darkness of the loft, she called: "Hubert Dunleven!"

As she waited, a stroke of fear almost stopped her heart. She was about to cry out again, as she scratched a match. Just as the light spurted at the end of the match, she heard a muffled yawn of prodigious dimensions. The flame of the match, clearing from sulphurous blue to yellow, showed her Hubert Dunleven rearing himself upon one elbow and making idle pretense of covering his yawn with one hand.

He sat up—a grisly fiend in appearance. He was never lovely. Last night, in his weariness and his pain, he had seemed almost pathetic. That was before she had known who he was, or the record that lay behind him. Now, with his hair on end, his eyes sunken, and his face covered with a shag of unshaven beard, he appeared a veritable devil.

He smiled at her and waved his hand. The girl shrank from the gesture. She had not noticed, the night before, how like the long arms and wide shoulders of a gorilla were the arms and the shoulders of the fugitive.

The match died in a gust of wind. She was left in the semi-blackness of the loft, and the monster was stirring. Panic came upon Nell Wooster. She hurried for the ladder, but she missed the trap and floundered into great darkness. An hysterical confusion crossed her mind, blotting out all cool common sense. She cried out; then she heard the scratching of a match, and there was a little spurt of flame.

There she saw the devil holding a light and grinning at her as he touched the flame of the match to the candle which she had put beside him here, the night before.

"There you are!" said Dunleven. "That ought to give you light enough for running away, eh?"

The light, the calmness of his voice, and above all the sight of the stained

bandages which wrapped his body, acted to clear her mind again. She turned back to him, smiling and flushed.

"I'm sorry," said Nell Wooster. "I thought for a minute——"

"Don't apologize," said Dunleven, and again he waved his gigantic arm airily. "Don't apologize. It's always been that way. I've always been so ugly that I've frightened the girls—and some of the boys, too!" He grinned with a sardonic self-content at Nell.

It amazed her to hear him, as much as it amazed her to see him. Suddenly she cried to him: "You were *not* desperately wounded last night when you came. It—it was a sham! You were *not* afraid that you were dying."

"I was," said Dunleven. "But of weariness more than wounds. That's the naked truth, if you'll have it. I was tired almost to death, Nell."

She put up her head at the familiarity in his tone.

"If you know my name," she said, "I know yours, also."

"You will not speak it," said he. "You may know it, but you will never speak it, eh?"

"Why not?"

"Because," said he, "well-bred little girls are taught not to call on the devil. Isn't that so?"

There was a good deal of iron in Nell Wooster, in spite of her mildness. "You need not treat me like a child, Hubert Dunleven!" said she.

He nodded, smiling at her.

"Good!" said he. "You are not afraid to say the name out loud! Hubert Dunleven! Hubert Dunleven! Do you know, my dear, that there are even a great many grown men and strong men who do not like to pronounce it carelessly? Believe me—for it is very true!"

"Do you boast of it?"

"Yes. I boast of it. It pleases me. I love to be feared, my dear!"

"Do not speak to me like this," said Nell Wooster, her dignity rising every moment. "I do not wish to be spoken to in this manner, Mr. Dunleven!"

"I cannot talk in any other," said Dunleven calmly. "For every person there is a proper tone. Some men must be talked to in pity, some in contempt, some in scorn, some in irony, some in good nature, some with indifference, some with gentleness, some with anger. Some men must be addressed with concern, some with amusement; some will have you speak bluntly, and some will have a veil thrown over everything that you speak. For each person in this world, there is an established tone which is proper to use upon him. And so there is for you only one proper tone, and that is the one which I am using at the present moment!"

She grew so angry that the blood beat a swift and aching throb in her temples. "And what is this tone, then?" asked Nell.

"My dear," said Dunleven, "the proper tone for you is one of affection and amusement, mingled in equal parts."

"What a detestable thing to say!"

"Not at all," said he, "if you have the patience and the intelligence to look at the matter with clever eyes. For you see that you are young and deliciously fresh and cool——"

"I don't want to hear you," cried Nell.

"You do, though," said Dunleven. "You don't like this patronizing manner, but you can't help enjoying this part of what I have to say. I say that you are really very pretty. Almost beautiful. Better than beautiful, to a person with proper taste. But, in addition to those charming qualities of person, you have courage, a child's curiosity, and a born honesty. All of these things are admirable. On the other side of the picture must be written down a good deal of vanity, a good deal of self-assurance, and a habit of

bearing a strong hand over men because you have found that your pretty face is enough to make them all foolish around you."

He paused and yawned, while Nell Wooster stood agape and dumb at such incredible assurance, such incredible effrontery. Never before had she encountered a man capable of speaking in this fashion.

"In the meantime," said the outlaw, "I am hungry as the very devil for which you mistook me a while ago. But I cannot dine on human souls, as the devils are believed to do with such relish. As a matter of fact, I am not greatly interested in souls—even in yours, my pet! I have an incurable admiration for bacon and eggs, however. I know that you have bacon, and did I not hear a hen cackling behind the cabin, a little time ago?"

What she wished, at that moment, was that a whole company of rangers might rush in upon this cool demon. Then she would be able to see whether or not this poise would hold in the face of men!

She said: "If I were able to ride, and if I were you, I'd jump on my horse and gallop hard. Because a Texas Ranger was here on your trail, last night!"

He nodded.

"Dear old Tipton," said he, "yes, I heard his voice. By the way, you have not answered me on the question of the eggs——"

"Confound the eggs!" cried Nell Wooster. "Aren't you——"

"Ashamed to be interested in such things? No, dear, there is nothing nearer to my heart. Have you any eggs, for the third time?"

"Yes," said Nell.

"Then run along and cook them—a dozen of 'em, if you will. And, in the meantime, in honor of an egg breakfast, I'll clean up and scrape off this beard."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE STORY.

ALL the kindness and the pity which the girl had felt for a wounded man had left her before she hurried down the ladder from the loft. Only a strict sense of duty to a stranger made her go sullenly ahead with the preparations for his breakfast. He seemed to take everything for granted, and that fact made her the more angry.

Presently he came down the ladder in turn, moving leisurely, and whistling softly as he climbed. He marched to the stove, found the steaming kettle of hot water, and poured out a quantity into a basin. Then he produced and unfolded a minute little shaving kit and, humming to himself, proceeded to shave with wonderful deftness and ease. He did not hurry, and yet every movement that he made counted. Before the eggs and bacon and coffee had been prepared, he was ready and waiting.

As she served him, she studied his long, lean face made ominous by the sunken eyes and the wide-boned jaw. She had thought that his unkempt ugliness could not be much improved upon; now that he was sleeked over, she thought him still more dreadful. The growth of hair on his face had served to mask some of its grimness. Now she could see the full truth about him, and that truth made her regret again that the clean-eyed, handsome ranger had not set his hands upon such a prize as this.

He ate his breakfast with dispatch, but still without apparent haste. Then he sat in a corner of the room and lighted a cigarette—not an honest wisp of brown paper filled by hand with yellow tobacco, but a "tailor-made" luxury from Egypt that filled the cabin with a rich, strange fragrance. All this time, he did not speak, but he continually eyed her with calm appraisal.

At length he smiled at her and said:

"This odd-smelling smoke will air out. Your father will never have a breath of it. As for myself, I'll be away in another moment or so. I only wish to sit here and chat with you a little more after breakfast. It's not good to hurry to work after eating, you know! Therefore—more talk, if you please!"

"Have you been talking?" she asked him gloomily.

"A constant stream of comment and interchanging views," said the outlaw. "I have not spoken a word for half an hour!"

"Ah, words," said he, "words are a small matter, my dear lady. A very small matter! Do you know that when good Indian warriors were on the war trail, they often went for whole weeks with hardly a word said? But they had signs. A sign language. And so have we civilized people—even when we least suspect it!"

She stared at him vaguely, without comprehension.

"For instance," said he, "there are your hands. Hands have an eloquence all their own. Your small brown ones, for instance, have never before served a meal to a hungry man without enjoying their work. They have been gay and swift and tireless. They have carried dishes to every hungry table with a certain charming eagerness. And it has been a sad thing to sit here and watch those hands working like slaves, heavily, joylessly dragging themselves along."

"Slaves!" said the girl in anger. "How could they be slaves? Do you think that I have fed you because I am *afraid* of you, Hubert Dunleven?"

He canted his head upon one side and grinned quizzically up at her. "How you say that name!" said he. "There are three devils—Beelzebub, Belial, and Hubert Dunleven! The last a little the blackest of all the three. However, I did not really mean that you were a slave to fear. The master your poor hands have been obeying so sadly is called conscience—which makes cowards of us all, as some one says—I forget his name. Conscience is a bitter task master, and it is conscience that has been berating you, and driving poor Nell Wooster to this work.

"'I will not serve him!' say the honest brown hands.

"'Yes,' says conscience, 'cook for him you must and shall, because he is a hungry, wounded, hunted man, and has three strong claims upon your hospitality!'"

He ended his whimsical speech, still shaking his head at her, and the girl drew back and watched him coldly.

"That's the sort of conversation which we've been holding," said Dunleven. "Looks and attitudes and gestures—much more important than words. A man will lie with his words, but he cannot control the corners of his lips, or his eyes. The truth comes into them, if you have half an eye to read it. Shall I tell you a story about that?"

"If you wish to," said Nell Wooster.

"Tut, tut!" said the bandit. "You want me to be gone, I know. Nevertheless this is a story which will interest even you. A very great deal, at that!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It was the thirteenth of September, and it was on Friday," said he, "a black Friday, you understand. And, like all criminals, of course I'm superstitious. Can't help it, you know! The odd ideas will come jumping into the mind of a hunted man, and then he is as weak as a woman.

"However, on the morning of that day a silly man decided that he would make himself famous, and so he tackled me. I didn't want to harm him—but he insisted. I had to shoot and the bullet traveled a whole span higher than I intended it to. I meant it for the hip. But it struck him in the body. A

nasty wound! A horribly nasty wound, and there was no doctor near. And nobody around with half as much sense in the treatment of wounds as I possess myself. I wanted, really, to stay and dress that wound and try to pull the silly fool through—but I knew that if I tried to stay, I'd be lynched. A crowd was up. It's temper was pretty high. And I decided that my life would be worth more to the world than that of my victim. You understand?"

"I hear what you say!" said Nell bitterly. "I suppose he was an honest man?"

"He was and is," said the outlaw. "He lived in spite of the bullet, and more in spite of the fellows who tried to doctor him. However, I rode out of that camp, convinced that there was a dying man behind me. In two hours, I was riding blind baggage—but when the train came into the first station, there was a crowd waiting. Too many guns in that crowd, I thought. They know something! And so I ran over the tops of the cars before the train came to a stand and dropped off the rear platform. But some of them saw me and started for me——"

"Heavens!" cried Nell.

"I thought the same thing," said the outlaw, grinning again. "But I managed to get around the first corner ahead of their bullets. A minute later I was on the back of a horse. I rode that horse into the ground in an hour, borrowed a second out of a field; changed that again in the middle of the afternoon, and in the evening I pulled into a mountain town rather fagged and hungry, because I hadn't slept more than a wink during the two nights that went before.

"Too tired to play safe, you understand? Should have cooked myself a snack among the trees, but there was a damp mist falling. I was half soaked, already. My stomach was empty. My matches were damp, too—and I had nothing but bacon and flour to cook. I decided to risk going into the hotel in that little town and getting a made-to-order dinner. You understand?"

"Yes, yes!" said Nell Wooster. "I understand. And then? And then?"

"And then I did that very thing. I went into the town. I tied my horse to the hitching rack. I walked into the hotel and in the lobby I warmed myself in front of the stove. Some of the men looked at me, but only because I looked wet and tired. Then I tried the dining room, and everything was easy.

"I sat there and ate a good steak while a conversation at the next table to mine described what I had done that morning and how I had been chased during the day. They didn't dream of looking across their shoulders at me and sizing me up. I got down to coffee and had one hot cup under my belt, when the talk at the next table shifted back a bit to the days when I had been doing something else. Then they began to talk about my ugly looks. In another minute the youngest fellow at that table looked across at me and from the corner of my eye, I saw him freeze.

"Yes, he had seen me and recognized me. The talk had brushed the mist from his eyes, at last. Now he was able to recognize that a handsome man-sized reward for my capture was sitting almost at his hand.

"The bigness of the discovery was too much for him. He couldn't believe that he had really seen me. He wouldn't trust his eyes.

"However, I knew that in another minute he would tumble out of the cloud. I had to do something. If it was to make a sudden move to escape—why, no man is half so fast with his feet as others are with their guns. I couldn't run away."

"Then what *did* you do?" gasped out the girl.

"Got up and walked away," said the devil in Hubert Dunleven. "I stood

up and stretched and told the waiter to bring in another cup of hot coffee for me because I'd be back in a minute. Then I walked out of the room—stopping near the door to admire a pair of elk horns hanging there. Just as I turned out of the door, the youngster came back to his wits and shouted: 'Hey, there—' "

"And then?"

"I just jumped sidewise through that door and sprinted. When I got to the front of the hotel, I didn't have any time to untie my horse. As a matter of fact, that horse was tired, anyway. Behind me, the boys were coming as fast as their boots would let them, and they were yelling that it was Dunleven, and that the best job was to kill the fox and not try to capture him at all. Real wicked talk, eh?"

He stopped, threw back his ugly head, closed his eyes, and laughed. She hated him as much as ever, but still she was so interested that she whispered:

"But you *did* get away?"

"A young fool on a brand-new saddle, in brand-new clothes, on a brand-new mare, and a beauty she was, rode around the corner of the hotel at that moment and I dived for him. I had him out of the saddle in a jiffy and sat in his place. So I scooted away into the thick of the dusk, with the bullets combing around me. But it takes good target work to nail a man on horseback, moving at full speed—very good work, too good to expect from a Colt, you know!"

"Ah!" said the girl. "What a dreadful thing!"

"I told you that," said Dunleven, "partly because I wanted to show off my good nerve and my quick thinking, I suppose; partly, too, to tell you what full conversation can be made up of nothing more than gestures and looks. One look gave me a warning as clearly as the fall of a red flag. Just as the look in your eyes, at this moment, says perfectly clearly: 'Can such a monster ever have had a mother?' "

He brought the point back to her with such a start that she jumped, and blinked at him again.

"Ah, well," said Dunleven, "here we are, the two of us again."

"Again?"

"I mean, the mare and I," said Dunleven.

"Ah," said Nell Wooster. "Do you mean to say that all of this happened only while you were fleeing from here to——"

"Not at all. It was a long time ago. But when I came back this way, I remembered that mare and, when I was in the need of a horse, I simply made a call—and found what I wanted! But you've seen her yourself, and she's a beauty, eh?"

CHAPTER IX

OF TIPTON.

HE finished his cigarette and leaned forward to rise, but Nell stopped him.

"You talk about your horse and about other things that you have done," said she, "but you don't speak about what matters most—your wound!"

"That," said Hubert Dunleven, "is really nothing. There is only a graze along my side. It cost me a little pain and a little weakness; but if it had not been that Tipton was after me, I should never have paused. I should never, certainly, have looked for shelter. But Tipton is no ordinary fellow. He is not even an ordinary ranger, and they're all an uncommon lot."

Nell shrugged her shoulders, decidedly unimpressed.

"You don't think much of him?" interpreted Dunleven.

"I've seen him and talked to him," said the girl.

"That's nothing," said Dunleven.

"The vocabulary of a fellow like Tipton was never meant to express what he is. He is a great deal more than he seems, believe me. He can't look like anything other than a simple good fellow. And he can't talk like anything more than that, either. But Tipton in action is another matter. Quite another matter!"

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Afraid of him? I fear him as most men fear the devil! Afraid of him? He has brought me to the verge of hanging, once, and to the very edge of prison three more times, I suppose. He has haunted my sleep for eight years. I dread him like poison!"

She shook her head.

"You don't believe me?"

"I don't believe you," said the girl.

"And why?"

"He's not so cunning," said Nell Wooster, as impersonally as her companion himself could have spoken, "and I'm sure that he isn't so clever with weapons. I know that he isn't even so strong, in spite of his size!"

With her eyes, she scanned thoughtfully the wide shoulders and the terribly long, sinewy arms of the outlaw. The other was smiling and nodding at her, very well pleased.

"That's true—that's *very* true," said he. "Not so clever with guns or with wits, that friend, Tipton, of mine. Not quite so strong in the hands and arms, either—though he comes terribly close to being. But he has something else that helps him against me."

"And what is that? The power of the law behind him?"

"Oh, that is something. It gives him extra hands to strike with and longer arms. He can use the telephone and the telegraph to head me off. He has the power to call in help when it comes to a pinch. But the law is only a minor asset to Tipton. He has two other things which certainly are huge advantages."

"I'd like to know them," said the girl.

"In the first place," said the outlaw, "he has the advantage of hating me."

"Is that an advantage? Can't you hate him back just as hard?"

"Yes," murmured the other, in thought, "when I was a trifle younger I was able to hate him. But I have become too mature and too intelligent to hate him any longer. When one has brains and uses them, he begins to see both sides of every important question. I cannot help seeing the good side of Tipton as well as the side that is dangerous to me. I can't hate him, to save myself. And therefore, he is constantly on edge against me, because that burning hatred which he always feels never will allow him to close his eyes. It serves him as food and drink. He can eat that hatred as I would eat a good steak. It is a spur driving into him. Some one of these days when I've lain down, tired out, that hatred will enable Tipton to drive up to me and get me. But, after all, the hatred of me is not the greatest thing that he owns."

"Then what else is there?" asked the girl, fascinated by this strange harangue.

"Something that you would not think of, because you possess it to a certain extent. The things we have never had seem very important when other people possess them, you know. You're honest, and therefore the honesty of Tipton doesn't seem a very great matter to you."

"Honesty?" cried she. "Will you tell me how in the world honesty could ever help him to capture a——"

"A crook? I'll tell you. The strongest man is the most natural man. A man can walk better on his feet than on his hands, because the feet are meant for walking, you know. And in the same way, we all have an instinct for doing the things that society de-

mands of us. That is when we are at our strongest—when we're serving other people as well as ourselves. And that is why Tipton has a great strength in his honesty. For instance, I couldn't buy him off; I couldn't beg him off. If his sweetheart and his old father and mother were all to be saved from drowning if he would leave his duty—they would drown, but his duty would have to be done. He has only one eye in his mind, and that looks straight before him and sees the things that have to be done, in order that he may be able to look every man in the world in the face. That is a huge matter with him. It means that he can look the world in the face, and it means that he can look *himself* in the face. A vast satisfaction! He loses no hours of sleep because of his past!"

"And do you?"

"Well, well," murmured Dunleven, "you will have me confessing my whole soul to you before I'm done. But it's true. I've lost sleep because of my past. Yes, I've lost plenty of sleep, I can assure you Now and then, no matter how well guarded one may be, one turns the corner and comes suddenly in sight of one's better self. Then there's the very devil to pay! Suppose that Tipton should come on me at such a time? He would find my muscles unstrung, my nerves jumpy, my eyes dim. I would be helpless against him. Furthermore, to fight down these weaknesses and this tendency to return to the normal, I have to expend an amount of effort which will, eventually, make me old before my time, while Tipton will still be fresh and young.

"And so, my dear Nell, you begin to see what reasons I have for dreading this blond, handsome, stupid-looking fellow—this same Tipton of whom you think so little?"

She was in a brown study.

"Everything that you say confuses me more and more," said she at last.

"Of course. Because I am showing you the whole truth. Half truths, or whole falsehoods, are simple and clear and easily understood. But the whole truth is like a forest of trees. Or it is like a jewel with so many facets that one can never see half of them at once. The colors seem to be changing."

"Will you tell me one thing more?"

"A hundred, if you wish."

"When you see the truth so clearly, why do you remain living this life, as you do?"

"I'll tell you," said the outlaw. "I have my regrets. I envy every man his quiet, peaceful life. When I see a pretty, sensible, sweet girl like you, I want to settle down and raise a family. A good job I should do of it, too! However, on the other hand, I am tormented by hard rides, cold nights, starvation periods, a thousand enemies, and above all—by the great Tipton—for he is really great, though I suppose that even my testimony could never convince the world of that. But to balance against all of these things, I have the perverse and exquisite pleasure of doing the unexpected, of baffling other men. Of matching my hands against ten thousand hands; of playing a great game which has not yet come to the last trick; of mastering all these very difficulties which I have enumerated. And all the prices that I pay are cheap for the great jewel which I am able to buy—freedom, freedom, freedom! My will is my own master! I do as I wish!"

"Ah, yes!" said the girl. "I understand!"

She nodded her head, with her eyes closed, and pain in her face.

"You want to be free," said the bandit; "you hate this drudgery. You are tired of slaving for that crotchety, sour-tempered, exacting father of yours, who takes everything for granted. You know that you have the looks and the talent to rule men and

make a place for yourself. And you feel that those talents are wasted here. Eh? Well, well! But you never could leave. Your honest soul would torment you to the end of time. You could never stifle the voice of conscience, as I have done. You never could do it, Nell, never! You haven't the strength!"

She leaped to her feet, angry and excited. "Do you think that I haven't?" said she through her set teeth. "Ah, well, you don't know me any more than I knew you, when I first saw you."

"Go on!" said the outlaw softly.

"No," said Nell; "no, I can't tell you."

"Too black?"

"Yes," said she. "It's too black a thing to confess even to an outlaw! But—I almost think that I'll do it!"

She roused herself. "Now you have to get away," said the girl.

"I do."

"I'll take you out and show you the field where I put your horse. It's a little pasture back among the trees. Nobody ever comes there. I didn't dare to let dad see her when he came home last night."

She led the way out of the cabin and across the clearing and through the woods to a small inclosure among the trees where the bay mare waited for them. And there she watched her companion cinch on the saddle. And he mounted.

"I shall not forget you, or what you have said," she told him soberly. "I shall always remember!"

"Good!" said Dunleven. "But there's one more thing that I forgot to add. I looked out of a cranny between the logs of the loft when big Tipton was riding away this morning——"

"You weren't asleep, then?"

"Certainly not! And as he rode over the hill he turned and looked back."

"But what of that?"

"Ah, you don't know Tipton. He never looks back, except when there's some shooting to be done toward the rear. He's not the type of fellow who turns his head a hair's breadth from the course of duty, as I said before. Duty this morning, as he thought, led him after me and across the hills. Now, my dear, if you need an interpreter, I'll explain the riddle for you. It simply means that young Tipton has found a girl whose face disturbs him. He's come across a dozen of them before. But none of them was the peculiar combination which was destined to knock at his heart and unlock the door to it! You, Nell, are the lucky girl!"

"You are laughing now!"

"Not a bit. There is your grand chance, Nell. Get him!"

"Is he richer than poor dad?" asked she angrily.

"Money!" said the outlaw. "Is it money, then, that makes such a great difference to you? Is it money?" He shook his head. "Ah, Nell, is that the flaw in you? I knew that something must be wrong, but I didn't know that the damage went so deep. Poor Nell! This—money! Of course!" He waved to the gloomy trees, then to her much patched dress. "I hardly blame you, Nell," said he. "But money? That's base!"

"It's what you rob and murder for!"

"Aye, but I'm a man, and not an angel! Good-by, Nell!"

A little passion seemed to grip him. He put the good bay savagely over the fence and was instantly gone among the trees.

CHAPTER X.

PLANS.

AT the edge of the wood the outlaw paused. He had put this half mile behind him at such a round pace that one would have thought that he never again expected to see that part of the world. That was exactly the impres-

sion which he hoped to leave in the mind of the girl. Once he was fairly out of sight and hearing, he drew rein.

The wound of which he had talked lightly was in reality torturing him. To be sure, as he had told Nell Wooster, it was no more than a glance of the bullet along his side, but that was enough to torment him. The flesh was torn away in a narrow furrow and the whole side was inflamed and swollen from his exertions of the night before. He could ride a great distance, he knew, if he wished to force himself—but he did *not* care to force himself. He had endured enough pain in his life to wish to avoid new torments if he could, and he saw no reason why he should not be as safe in this wood as in any other place.

First, he rode in a brief circle which wound out upon itself until his trail was like an endless spring coiled upon the central point. One would have thought that he was cutting for sign. As a matter of fact, he was doing just the opposite. He was hunting for a place in which he could make his trail disappear.

He came, at the last, upon exactly the place that he wanted. It was a narrow creek which cut down a slope at a good rate of speed and had carved out a steep-sided gulley for itself. On one side there was a broad ledge of rock—a gray stone which was new to the eye of the outlaw. It was as hard as quartzite and took the shod fall of the hoofs of the bay mare as though they had been mere pelting pellets of swan's down. One would have needed a microscope to discern the traces which the iron shoes left on that flinty surface.

Down this platform the bandit continued for a quarter of a mile. Half a dozen times he came to sharply shelving surfaces where it seemed impossible that a horse could go. In each place he dismounted and, with hand and voice, encouraged the mare until he got her up or down to the new footing. She was agile, in spite of her size, and as docile as a trained dog.

The course he took was upstream, straight toward the head of the valley down which the creek poured. The farther he continued the ranker and thicker grew the underbrush, and the taller and darker arose the trees. He could see why the place had never been cut by the lumbermen. The bed of the creek was too thoroughly blocked with jagged boulders for logs to be floated down to the main river and thence to a sawmill. In addition, it would be impossible to drive a road straight over the hills at this point. Far ahead of him he heard a constant and ominous voice. Presently he perceived the white leap of the waterfall, dropping a hundred feet from the edge of the cliff above and leaping in a dazzling cloud from the rock which it struck beneath.

That precipitous rise blocked all travel through this narrow blind alley among the hills. Since there was no outlet here, it seemed fairly certain that no one would search for him in this direction. It was not likely that he would travel into a pocket if he could avoid it. Still less likely was it that he would take hiding in such a place. Four men, well posted across the mouth of this valley, could coop him here until he starved. If he wished to go over the hills, he could only do it by leaving his horse, saddle and all behind him.

For these very reasons he decided that the place was made to his order. Clever as Tipton had become on the trail, by dint of the long experience of the years, he was hardly apt to look for his quarry in such grounds as these. All that Dunleven wanted now was an adequate shelter.

He did not attempt to select some dark and dingy cranny among the rocks, where he would nearly die of depression if he did not die of the cold and the damp. No, for secrecy he relied

entirely upon the nature of the valley itself. He selected as the temporary home a face of rock that angled sharply out from the cliff. He set against this some fallen branches that he found already prepared to his hand by the storms. Over these he threw fresh cuttings from the evergreens, woven together according to an art which he had learned in a rude fashion from an old Yaqui long years before. So arranged, the evergreens made a shelter that was stronger than it looked; for a week or ten days it ought to avail him to turn the water and the wind.

This gave him a clumsy lean-to, long, dark, and narrow against the face of the stone. He brought into it a great pile of evergreen cuttings to make a bed and keep a fresh, dry stock on hand.

Then he pressed through the brush and the trees until he found a place where the trees grew sparsely enough to admit luxuriant grass to grow around them. Here he left the bay mare. He continued his work until he had found a rabbit at the edge of the woods. This he shot and, bringing it back to his new home, cooked and ate—to the last morsel.

When all this was accomplished, he heated some water and looked to his wound. In spite of the pain which it gave him, it was in better condition than he had hoped. He washed it clean, rearranged a bandage, and washed the old cloths in which it had been tied. After that he settled down to an animal life.

He had no books to read. The valley was so cramped and small that he could have learned it by heart in an hour's ramble. Yet he was not bored or wearied by this life. Like a wounded bear, he spent the time studying the progress which the wound made toward recovery, watching the slow drift of time over his head. He slept much; he ventured out once each day, shot game, returning to cook and eat his single meal, waited for the fall of another night, and then the rising of another day.

In this fashion the time passed with him. At length a week, and then ten days had passed—and the wound was, to all intents and purposes, cured. He would not willingly have entered upon a hand-to-hand struggle with a strong man at the end of this time. But, though he was thin and a little weak from these days of quiet life, his spirit had grown calm and strong in this period of peace. The world had passed him in the distance, like a strong flow of water which keeps an echo about the house on the hill. It was never out of his mind, and yet it was never wholly in it. When he caught the bay mare again he found her apparently like himself—younger, gayer, refreshed, and eager for her return into the world.

So he rode down the valley and came again to the more open country beyond. His plan was definite. He would drift to Denver. There he would make a change of clothes, and in an hour or so after his entry to the city he would be at a certain spot not far from the city limits, where he knew the grade slowed the eastbound trains to a creeping gait. That creeping gait might have seemed a dizzy enough speed to some; to Dunleven it was just sufficient to enable him to enjoy the swing onto the iron ladder which would lead him to the top of a box car as the freight whirled past. Perhaps he would meet with an obnoxious "shack," but there were ways and ways of "persuading" a shack to be kind. He knew them all.

Perhaps he would need ten days, or perhaps he would need twenty, if he decided to take the longer, slower routes through New Orleans and then north again. But at last he would be burrowed away in a safe quarter of Manhattan, where the shifting of the crowds provides a perfect screen for

those who do not wish their movements to be seen.

After that, who could tell where the next move would take him? He might take ship for the farther side of the Atlantic, where he had stuck some excellent blows before this. He might drift to the West Indies, where there was much that needed doing, from his point of view. Again, it was some time since he had followed the cold trails of northern Canada; Alaska was a land where his ugly face was fortunately not well known; and always he had the sunny land of Mexico to enter when on pleasure bent. Mexico, which he knew and loved so well!

Indeed, the trails of crime which his forbears had established hither and yon across the globe were now all open to Dunleven. He used them all, and he used them purposely. He had always had a feeling that, if he ventured to remain for long in the States, the inevitable Tipton would have a strong grasp upon him. By whisking into the States and out again, he passed from the view of the ranger, and then swung back across his horizon again in a baffling manner.

The head of the outlaw was filled with these plans. The thought of Canadian furs, of French wines, of Mexican white walls, of island palms, and the roar of Manhattan traffic all mingled in his mind's eye. His wallet was filled richly with money. There were certain accounts, too, which were opened to him in various banks, under various names. These were friends which he could lean upon in times of need.

He started off gayly enough. Everything contented him. Above all he was pleased with the feeling that the ten days which he had spent in seclusion must have been enough to totally bewilder Tipton. Where the ranger might be hunting for him now, he could not guess. Perhaps, as had happened a few times before, even the bulldog ranger had been forced to confess himself beaten and had gone back to report another failure to his captain.

Such things were well enough to sweeten the way for Dunleven, and yet he was not happy. He strove to understand some reason for this strange state of affairs, but reason there seemed none. There was a weight upon his mind. Turning his head from this section of the country, he felt that he was leaving something of importance behind him, though what that might be he could not tell.

He came up to the crest of a wooded rise where the trees thinned out. From this vantage point he could scan a long ribbon of road that tossed up and down the length of a narrow valley at the side of a stream whose waters were yellow with a recent freshet.

A rider came onto this road around the farthest bend, swinging along at a racing gallop. The outlaw, unlimbering his field glasses and bringing them to a focus, made out that it was a girl. Then, around the bend behind her, came a man riding in pursuit, it seemed, for every now and then the girl would look back and then urge her mount to fresh efforts.

He saw with the very first glance that the pursuer would win. There was too much quality in the long legs of his horse for the mustang which she bestrode to carry her out of reach.

Dunleven and the bay mare were in action instantly. He was not a sentimentalist. Certainly he was no knight-errant. What he hated most in the world, perhaps, was to see the strong take advantage of the weak, whether the weak were woman or man. The bay mare cut down the slope like a flash, and he halted in the last thick screen of trees just beside the road well before either the girl or her pursuer reached that spot. So, looking out through his covert, he received a sudden shock of

rage, and shame, and satisfaction. For yonder rode a man who was a stranger to him, but the girl who flogged her failing mustang down the road was none other than Nell Wooster. Aye, and now, realizing that her game was lost, she pulled up her horse almost opposite the place of the outlaw and whirled to face the stranger.

CHAPTER XI.

A BARGAIN.

THE savage satisfaction of Dunleven was increased. He had no desire to act suddenly. But he knew that this fellow was in the hollow of his hand. What a groaning and snarling and yelling there would be when the strong hand closed!

It began in a way far other than Dunleven had expected.

The stranger pulled up his horse beside the girl's and said: "Darn it, Nell, why did you run away?"

"Because I didn't want to talk to you," said Nell Wooster.

"A mighty poor reason, and you know it," said the other. "You might have known that old Fidget would run you down."

"I knew Fidget," said the girl, "and I knew that you would flog him within an inch of his life if he didn't get up to me. But just the same I hoped that I could get away, 'Chip.'"

"And why?" asked Chip. "D'you think that I'm some moving-picture villain? I haven't come to pester you if you don't want to be pestered. I'm not in the position of having to do that, and you ought to know it!"

She nodded.

"I know it, Chip," said she.

"When I saw you yesterday," said he, "I told you to take a day and think over what I had said. You agreed that you'd talk to-day. But if you don't want to talk—why, hang it, you don't have to. Only it made me mad to have you scamper off like that when you saw me. As though I was a dragon, or something. What's the matter with you?"

"Look here, Chip Wheeler," said the girl, "why do you really, down in your heart, want to marry me?"

"Why does any fellow want to marry?" he asked.

"Part of 'em because they see that their friends are married," said the girl; "part of 'em because they want a woman at home to fuss over them when they come in with wet feet and a cold in the head. Part of 'em because they want a home started; part of 'em because they don't know any cheaper way of getting their meals cooked. And a few because they get silly about some girl."

"Always thinking things out, ain't you?" remarked Chip Wheeler. "Never seen a girl like you for thinking things out, Nell. Now, where do you put me on that list?"

"You don't exactly belong in that list," said Nell.

"Don't I? I'm glad that you see I ain't like all the dunderheads in this neck of the woods."

"I didn't say that you were any better."

"Go on, then, and tell me what's what."

"Why, since you bought the Crocker place on the hill you think it's foolish not to have a woman there to run it and boss things around and dress fine and look like a rich man's wife."

"Bah!" exclaimed Chip. "That's a fine way for you to talk, Nell!"

"That isn't the only reason," said Nell.

"No," said he, "because I've always intended that I'd marry you some day. You know that!"

"I know that, and I know why you wanted me, too," said she.

"Tell me, then."

"Because you wanted something to

show off and have over the rest of the men and their wives around here."

"Did I?" asked Chip, grinning. "Ain't you a little fond of yourself, honey?"

"Oh, no, I don't say that I'm made of better stuff. I don't say that I'm half as good as most of them; but I'm prettier than most; and I could be stylish enough to suit even a rich man. You keep that in mind. Besides, I'm a little smarter. I could show you how to polish yourself up a little and get you ready to step around among some of the near-swells. You've had all of those things in your mind."

He stared at her, not embarrassed, but wondering.

"That's it," said he. "That's what I've always felt and what I've always said. You think too much!"

"Right!" said she. "And a good girl doesn't waste too much of her time thinking. I know that as well as you do. I've thought enough to get discontented with the shack and the way that we live in it. I've thought enough to make pretty sure that I've got to have comfort. You know that. You would be ashamed to talk to another girl the way that you've dared to talk to me before, and the way that you'll talk to me to-day. And that's why I wanted to ride away from you."

He nodded and smiled faintly again, running his eyes over her and the tired horse.

"Dog-goned if you're not a corker, Nell," said he. "You'd make a partner for a man, you would."

"Aye," said she, "that's just what I would! A partner, but not a wife, and I know it as well as you do."

"Ain't there *any* love in you, Nell?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "There is. But it would take a whale of a man to get it out of me. A regular whale of a man!"

"There's no such man in the world," said he. "You can lay to that. You've fallen in love with some dream man. That's all. There ain't a chance of turning it into flesh and blood!"

She laughed, and her laugh had an ugly ring in it. "What if I were to tell you that I've *met* a man that I could almost love?"

He glared at her. "It's that tall blockhead of a ranger! It's that Tipton, who's always hanging around!"

"Is it?" said she. "Well, old-timer, you've guessed wrong!"

"It's Tipton!" he insisted. "That big fathead——"

"Stop it!" said the girl, flushed with anger. "He's a lot too fine for you to blackguard him. He's a lot too fine for me, too. I never met such a fine fellow in my life."

"There!" exclaimed the other. "You've admitted that he's the man. What's the matter? Can't you get him to the point of proposing to you?"

She fingered the handle of her quirt as though she were tempted to lash Chip Wheeler with it. Then she shrugged her shoulders. "After all," said she, "it doesn't matter what you think. I've said that it wasn't Tipton. Now you can go ahead and flatter me with any sort of thoughts that you have on hand! I don't care!"

At this he lifted his lean, homely face, and smiled again. "Well," said he, "let that go, will you? I don't care about the ranger. You're not going to him. You're going to me. I'll tell you why you're going, too. I'm going to bid so high that you won't be able to afford to refuse."

"Will you?" said she. "You make me mad, Chip—you're so cocksure!"

"I've got reason to be cocksure. I know that a man has got to pay for class when he wants to have it. That's why I outbid everybody else for the old Crocker place. And then, when the bargain was closed, what did I do? I added five thousand on top of what I'd agreed to and wrote out the check in

even figures. That's the kind of a man I am. I like to do things up handsome, Nell, when I put my mind to it."

She listened to this boasting thoughtfully.

"That's partly brag," said she, "but it's partly true, also. You've always squeezed dollars till they screamed. But that was when you were out to make a fortune."

"Oh," said Chip, "and I'm still making it. You don't think that I'm contented with the sort of things that I've done up to this time, I hope, because I'm not. Not a bit of it! I'm a big man in this county, but that's not enough for me. I'm going to climb until I'm a big man in New York, too. I'm going to sit down on the inside circles and look through the windows at the crowd going past! That's me, Nell. You can throw away the dyed goat and wear sable when you hook a Mrs. in front of my name! I'm going to kite you up like you were hitched to a balloon!"

"That sounds to me," admitted the girl. But it seemed to Dunleven that she turned a little pale, as though in disgust at her own speech. "Oh, I'm low enough to like that!"

"I'll tell you what," said Chip. "I'm honest enough to admit that you're right. I need you. I pay for class. I paid for the Crocker place. I paid a thousand for this nag because I wanted the right thing under my saddle. And you've got class, Nell, too. You ain't the greatest beauty in the world. You ain't got a great name. You started right down on my level, and you know what has to be done to my hands before they can be crowded into kid gloves. I could talk to you, man to man, and you wouldn't whine. Now I'll tell you what. When you marry me you get your own bank account. A sweet one, too. You get your own rooms in the house. You get money to buy your own library that you've always been so keen on. You get your own horses. And—you *get your own time!* Understand?"

She looked him straight in the eye.

"How much?" said she. "How much time shut of you and your business and your house, Chip?"

"Why, three months!" said he.

"Six!" she said. "Six months, or I won't listen."

"No! That would make a scandal. They would say that I'd married a woman that I couldn't keep in hand and——"

"Chip, let me have the six months, and the remaining half of the year I'll be so fine to you that they'll all have to point me out as a model wife. I give you my word for that!"

He drew a long breath. "I believe that you would!" said he. "And now that you prove you mean what you say, you send that Tipton marching and tell him that you never want to see his face again! Just them words!"

"Not for ten million dollars!" said she.

"Then the deal is off right now! No, I don't mean to talk in that tone. I can't bully you, and I know it. But—I'm afraid of that ranger, Nell, and that's a fact."

"All right, then," said Nell. "I'll send him packing—but in my own words. And now—I want to ride home alone. So long, Chip!"

CHAPTER XII.

THREE DAYS.

DOWN the road toward the house of old Wooster the outlaw rode at a brisk gait. When he came fairly near to it he turned aside into the trees and pushed the mare cautiously through the tangles of trees and underbrush. When he came in sight of the house of Wooster he was not surprised to find the tall, strong horse of Tipton tethered near the door. From the tone of the girl he

had gathered that the ranger was probably at hand. Dunleven could guess at the reason for it. When the ranger had missed the trail of his quarry he had waited near the point where it had disappeared. While he patiently combed the country in the hope of discovering some trace of the bandit, here was the girl at hand. There could be no doubt that the two motives kept the ranger in this place.

Now, through the shelter of the trees, Dunleven saw Tipton himself come forth. The girl accompanied him to the door of the cabin, and there she paused and leaned against the jamb, with one arm stretched up above her head. Their voices came faintly to the listening ear of Dunleven.

"But you haven't asked me why you have to go, John," said she.

The big man merely smiled at her. "In my company of rangers," said he, "we don't ask questions. But when we get the order, we just march."

"But somehow," said Nell Wooster, "it makes me terribly unhappy. I feel that I've done a wrong to you, John."

"No wrong at all," said Tipton. "I've told you that I love you, Nell. I've told you that nearly every day since the first day. And if that don't do you any harm, it don't harm me, either. And so we're all quits. So long, Nell!"

"Wait a minute, John," said the girl.

"Aye," said Tipton, turning back.

"I want to say something," said she, "but I don't find the words that are right."

"I'm glad to stand and say nothing and look at you, Nell."

"Is it the last time that I'll see you, then?" asked Nell Wooster sadly.

"Oh, no," said Tipton. "I'll be back some day and find out the name of your husband and the names of your kids. I don't give up friends so quick as all that, Nell."

"Good-by, dear John," said she.

"Good-by, Nell," said the ranger, and as he mounted his horse she closed the door in haste, as though afraid to keep him in view too long."

He turned his horse straight into the trees, and Dunleven swung sharply in behind him.

"Tipton!" he cried.

The ranger stopped his mount with a jerk and stiffened in the saddle. "Aye, Dunleven," said he. "It seems that you've got me, after all. Is it what you've been waiting for, to take me from behind?"

"You know me better than you pretend," said the outlaw. "Just pass your word to me that you'll make no try for a gun, and then turn around and we'll have a chat."

"You have my word," said the ranger.

He turned his horse about. Even though he knew that Dunleven was there, when his eye fell on the outlaw his nostrils quivered and his eyes flashed.

"You're hot to get at me, old-timer, aren't you?" asked Dunleven.

"Never mind that," said Tipton. "This is another one of your days, but my time may be coming. I'm ready to wait again!"

"Aye," said Dunleven, putting up his Colt, "you'll wait and maybe you'll have me behind the bars one of these days. Why the devil don't I finish you off, now that I have the chance?"

"Because," said the ranger, "rotten bad as you are, there's one thing that you're above—and that's murder."

"Ah! But you'd never admit that in a courtroom."

"Maybe not. In a courtoom you don't need any help from me. Now, what do you want out of me by talk?"

"A couple of questions answered, Tipton. The first one is: What makes you hate me so bad?"

"What makes any decent man really hate you?" asked Tipton almost savagely.

"Well, that's a riddle to me. Go on and answer it."

"Because the thing that makes life good for any decent man is living inside the law. And you're outside of it!"

"Come, come!" murmured Dunleven, smiling. "Law is just a name. Nobody could have all the love for the law that you pretend to have. Come out in the open and tell the truth. You've never given over a grudge for the times that I've beaten you! That's the answer. That's what has kept you trailing after me all of these years!"

Tipton shook his head without passion. "You're like the rest of the crooks," said he. "You can't figure that anybody has motives better than yours. You think that everybody would be a crook if they had the nerve to go through with it. Isn't that what you feel?"

"Humph!" said Dunleven. "Maybe I do. Maybe I do, without putting it into words as crisp as all that. So you're going to keep trailing me to the end of time for the sake of the law? Why, Tipton, when I'm caught, one of your superiors will find a way to jump into the newspapers and take all the credit away from you."

Tipton waved a big hand that dismissed such an idea to the uttermost limits of limbo. "What's newspaper talk to me?" said he. "If I take you, I'll know that I've done something worth while, you can bet on it. I don't want to know what other folks think about me. I want to know what I think about myself. That's what counts."

The outlaw urged his horse a little nearer and stared curiously into the face of his old antagonist.

"Aye," said he. "There's something in that. It's what puts you beyond me, Tipton, I'm free to confess. It's what makes me respect you, more than any other man that I've ever met. Well, old-timer, I hope that when the end comes it will be with you and me fighting it out hand to hand. If I have to go down, I'd rather have it by you than by anybody else!"

"You've had your talk," said Tipton, still watching the outlaw with narrowed eyes of suspicion and of disgust. "Are you through with me now?"

"Not quite. I want to talk about your own business first."

"I'm tired of this, Dunleven. I hate the sight of your face and the sound of your voice. Hurry through with it, will you?"

"I've come to the girl now. I've come to Nell Wooster."

The ranger gasped. Then his anger mounted to his eyes. "There's nothing that a gent like you can say to me about a woman like her, Dunleven," he declared. "I want none of your talk about her!"

Dunleven's even temper flared.

"You blockhead!" said he. "I've got more than half a mind to let you throw away your happiness into the junk heap. I would, if it weren't for the girl's sake!"

Tipton faltered and blinked. "It's wrong for me to let you talk about her," he said at last. "I oughtn't to do it, I suppose!"

"Tipton," said the outlaw, "did she tell you why you had to march?"

"She said that there was another man."

"Do you know what man?"

"What business had I to ask?"

"Tell me this: Do you know the other men who come to see her?"

"Yes, some of them."

"Are they a good lot?"

"Yes. I like them all—except one! There's only one bad one in the lot."

"Tipton, the bad one is the fellow that's to get her, according to the present lie of the cards."

"Chip Wheeler?" asked the ranger. "I won't believe that!"

"I tell you it's the truth. Tell me

what you know about Wheeler, and then I'll tell you where he stands."

"What right have I to talk behind her back and his?"

"You fool! Put your scruples in your pocket for five minutes and listen to a little good sense, will you? I say: Wheeler is booked to have her. Now tell me what Wheeler is."

"Have you seen him?" muttered the ranger.

"Yes. I've seen him and his tricky little rat eyes. Is he as bad as he looks?"

"He's worse, by a good deal. I'll tell you how he started. He was a faro dealer in Juarez and he beat his boss out of about ten thousand. He jumped to Havana and had a lucky season on the race track playing the ponies."

"I don't believe it!" said the outlaw. "A cur like that never had the courage to risk good money on a race that wasn't fixed."

"That's just what I mean," answered Tipton. "He spent half his money fixing the races and the other half he bet. He had a hundred thousand when he got word that Cuba was a pretty feverish climate for him to hang out in. Then he blew and hit Manhattan. He tried the races again—working some of the pools. He had two hundred thousand when he come back West to his home country. And he had the sense to risk fifty thousand in the Caulkins Lumber Co. They'd put in half a million to open up their track, but they needed a little bit more to complete the work. He put in the extra bit, and he held them up for pretty near a half interest! Well, that deal turned out big. Caulkins has brains. And the company is worth more than a million in hard cash right to-day."

Dunleven whistled. "I had no idea that he was as big a bird as this," said he.

"He's growing all the time," said Tipton. "He plays every chance that's really crooked and is legally safe. Why, Dunleven, when I think of him, you look almost like a good, honest man to me!"

"Thanks!" said the outlaw dryly. "But now I ask you, Tipton, if a decent man like you will stand by and see a good girl tumble into the hands of a rat like this?"

"What can I do?" asked the ranger.

"Nothing?" asked Dunleven savagely.

"Tell me where you collected all this interest in the girl?" asked Tipton.

"Why, you fool!" said Dunleven. "She put me up in her house in spite of her father and in spite of you on the first night that you saw her. That's the sort of a person that she is!"

"The stains on the floor——" gasped out Tipton.

"Were mine, you blockhead! And she cut her finger right under your eyes and made you believe that *that* was the cause. I lay in that attic and laughed till my sides ached to think that such a fool as Tipton was trying to catch such a man as me!"

Tipton seemed all at sea. "I never even dreamed that it was in her!" he said.

"You hate her for helping a crook, I suppose?"

"I love her for it more than ever!" broke out Tipton. "It's wrong, of course, but I can't help loving her for it!"

"Then prove that, man!" said Dunleven. "If you won't try to save her from the hands of this cur of a Wheeler, will you promise me to keep off my trail for a week while *I* try to help her out of the hole?"

"Keep off your trail—give up following you?" asked Tipton. "I've sworn an oath to my State. I can't go back on that oath, Dunleven."

The outlaw reined back his horse with a snarl.

"I'm tired of trying to save you from

yourself," said he. "Now talk turkey. Will you give me your promise and see the girl saved, or will you keep on like a selfish fool trying to catch me, and let her go to the devil—or worse? Why, Tipton, I overheard them! He wants to buy her for a show—like a horse—or a piece of furniture—and she's almost willing to go for the sake of getting rid of the mean life in that shack of a house, yonder! You understand me?"

Tipton wrung his hands. "I wish I knew what to do! I wish that I could be told!" he cried, groaning.

"I tell you what to do! Give me that promise. I only ask for three days. Then you'll have your chance at me again. But before you take your chance at me, I advise you to go to the girl and tell her that you love her."

"I've told her that," said Tipton simply.

"Told her that!" cried Dunleven. "Have you laid hands on her and told her that you'd die if you didn't have her?"

Tipton gaped at him. "A lie like that!" he muttered.

"Aye," said Dunleven, "marriage is one long lie, and you've got to take the first step in lying before you can get into the blessed state. No girl wants to marry a man. She wants to marry an archangel. Have you tried to make her think that you're an archangel, you booby? No, but you're going to! Do you think that she would have coddled you with her eyes and her voice when she was saying good-by to you if she hadn't wanted to have you, really? No, she wouldn't. Now give me that promise—you'll keep off my trail for three days!"

Tipton dragged off his hat, breathing deeply. He was like one whose sight has been seared by a flash of lightning striking at his very feet.

"I suppose that I will promise!" said he.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEELER'S OATH.

WITH that promise in his mind, like a purse of gold in a messenger's bosom, Dunleven started joyously away for his work. He had waited only to learn a few more details concerning the husband-to-be of Nell Wooster. When big Tipton had told him these things, and, among the rest, where the house of the rich man was to be found, Dunleven headed straight for it.

There in the shadows of the woods that afternoon he made the circuit of the grounds to make sure how great was this single property which had passed from the hands of the Crockers, who developed it, to those of Wheeler, who would exploit it. There was everything here that a man could want—acres and acres of woodland, of pasture, of range land, of farming bottoms. There was the great house built to stand there forever. There were the barns and the sheds and all the outbuildings.

When the gloom of the evening began and the lights shone, Dunleven, gritting his teeth in the outer gloom, asked himself why a scoundrel like this Wheeler should have such a treasure in his hands, and what justice would permit such a girl as Nell Wooster to be added to the long list of his possessions? He asked himself this and then he sat down to wait.

The patience which had endured ten days of half starved existence in the wilderness could hardly endure the single evening which Dunleven had to pass through before he sat unannounced in the bedroom of Wheeler.

The evening of that late September had turned cold, with a raw wind blowing from the northeast, sending the big, newly dead leaves of autumn whirling out of the blackness like futile little ghosts which pressed their hands against the brightness of the windowpanes and then vanished.

Dunleven took note of these things; then he stretched his hands to the fire on the big open hearth. The underlayers of resinous pine spurted blue jets of flame and filled the room with a cheerful chattering and delicious fragrance. The layers of oak above began to smoke and blacken and burn slowly at the edges. All this work of the fire was against a burly backlog, fresh hewn, solid, nicely fitted to the dimensions of the hearth. A good bit of wood, as substantial, one might say, as the rising fortunes of the young master of the house. Yet—suppose that that backlog were broken up and tossed over the flames, how long would it last? Hardly as many minutes as it would otherwise endure weeks.

Such were the thoughts of Dunleven while he sat there, smoking at his ease, tapping the ashes on the hearth. When he heard a long, steady, assured stride coming down the hall he decided that it was time to move. He tossed the cigarette into the fire. He stood up and glided to a tall, heavy red curtain that dropped from the very ceiling and covered the entrance to an adjoining room.

Behind the division of this curtain he stood at wait, his revolver in his hand; he saw Wheeler enter, pause at the door with his head raised, scenting the tobacco fumes which had not yet vanished, and then stride to the fire, in front of which he stood with blackening face. Then Wheeler started with hasty strides toward the door.

"Wait half a minute, Wheeler!" said the outlaw.

Chip Wheeler half turned, saw the glint of light from the gun that peered forth between the two folds of the curtain, and then reeled as though he had been struck, throwing his hands above his head.

"It's Parker!" gasped out Wheeler. "Parker—it's you! If you've come about your father, I swear, old man, that I did nothing but business with him. He begged for that loan. He begged for it, I tell you! I can show you a letter from him! I told him money was tight. I told him that I would have to make extra hard terms if he insisted—Parker, how was I to know that the old man would get excited when the time to pay came? I didn't mean the talk about disgrace and exposure that I sent him. That's just a form letter to get money out of slow payers. But how was I to guess that your father would get—er—nervous—and kill himself for nothing? How was I to guess?"

"You knew that my father would pay," hazarded Dunleven. "He's always paid every debt that he ever contracted. You knew that he would pay, even if bad luck held him back for a little. Then—why did you start hounding him the minute that the money was due? You killed him, Wheeler. You killed him without mercy!"

"No, Parker—and for heaven's sake turn that gun another way—or step out here into the light where I can see your face. You don't intend to murder me, Parker? An idea like that would never come into your mind—not to me—a friend like me that can set you up and make you."

It was not exactly the most craven kind of fear, it seemed to Dunleven. It was rather the excitement of a man who desperately hates to lose a matter upon which he places much value. So it was with Chip Wheeler. Having the thought of death in front of him, it was not fear of the ghostly end of all things that moved him; it was the terrible regret for the work which he would leave undone, and the opportunities for fortune and place making which would be thrown away.

Dunleven stepped out into the light, smiling, and a wave of relief crossed the face of the master of the house.

Wheeler said, "I really thought that it was Parker——"

"Keep up your hands, Wheeler."

"I've got to have a drink. Pour it for me out of that bottle with your own hands, if you want to. I've got to have a drink. This relief is almost too much!"

"It may not be a relief," said Dunleven slowly. "Do you know who I am?"

"I don't care, as long as you're not Parker. I don't care, stranger. You've come to rob me and my house. Well, I never keep hard cash in the house. It's the bank's business to do that little job for me. But you'll find some first-rate silver—something in the line of oil paintings downstairs, they tell me. And if you've got a moving van along, you might be interested in some of this old furniture. Help yourself to every little thing that you see."

"Why," said the outlaw, "you're cool. You have nerve, my friend. There's material in you, as an old friend of mine used to say, enough to make a good man out of. Instead of that—there's you!"

"Not good enough for you, stranger?" asked the money-maker. "Well, what don't you like?"

"I'll tell you in the first place that you're a fine case for hanging. But you're too clever to get the rope around your neck. The kind of crimes that *you* commit wind up with old men committing suicide——"

"That old fool! He's not on my conscience."

"You haven't any conscience," said the outlaw. "My own is pretty near the vanishing point. But compared with you, I'm a spotless angel, newly dressed for heaven, as somebody said. But to get to the point, what I chiefly object to is your matrimonial attack. Buying women is an old dodge. But very few have the nerve to try to buy a girl like Nell Wooster."

Wheeler blinked, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"You're somebody," he decided, "and you know something. But what do you want with me?"

"I came here to kill you, Wheeler. I knew that you were a dog. I thought that I'd kill you and remove temptation from the way of the girl. Sweep the dirt out of her path, you see? However, I'm a mighty tender-hearted fellow. I really hate to kill, if it can be avoided. After looking you over, I've decided that you might listen to reason. Wheeler, I'll take your word of honor sworn to me now, that you won't marry Nell Wooster—and that you'll break with her to-morrow before noon. You do that—or I come gunning for you. You hear me talk?"

"Very cross," said Wheeler slowly. "Yes, yes, a very cross man. Are *you* wanting to marry her?"

"That doesn't follow."

"I think I'll tell you to go to the devil," said Wheeler. "I don't believe that you're man enough to do a murder, stranger."

"Look at me again," said the outlaw. "I'm not such a stranger to you as all of this, and you ought to know me a little better than you pretend to do."

Wheeler peered, but then he shook his head.

"I'll refresh your memory, then," said the bandit. "You've seen my face on posters before this."

"Vaudeville? Trick shooting, eh?" asked Wheeler, without alarm.

"No," said Dunleven, "wanted for certain killings, jail breakings, robberies, and such trifles as that."

Wheeler leaned across the table. "Ah," said he. "Dunleven."

"Now you know me!"

"It alters things a good deal, I have to admit," said the money-lender. "Your remarks, which seemed so unreasonable a little time ago, now seem worth considering. Because, if you're

Dunleven—you really *would* kill me out of hand."

"With a most exquisite satisfaction, you worthless rat!" said Dunleven, smiling.

"Well, sir," said Wheeler, sitting down and leaning back at ease in his chair, "if my promise will suit you, I'll give you my promise that I won't marry Nell Wooster."

"Raise your hand," said Dunleven. "If there's anything sacred in your heaven or your honor, I'm going to find out. Swear by those things first!"

"By the whole galaxy of the saints, if you want me to," said Wheeler, and raised an obedient hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GUARD.

WHEN Dunleven had accomplished the first stage of his work he retired to the forest not altogether pleased with himself. He felt that he knew two things. The first was that Wheeler would never dream of performing the promise which he had just made to break off his engagement to Nell Wooster before noon of the next day; otherwise he would never have made the promise so glibly. The second thing which he knew was that of all the men he had ever known in his long career of crime, he had never met one so utterly lacking in all the qualities which make a man worth esteem as this maker of dollars.

Again, what made the task that lay before him more pleasant, was that this would be no simple affair. For Dunleven knew this third thing which was not of the least importance—that Wheeler was a man of able hand and perfectly capable of taking care of himself in an emergency.

So Dunleven retired to the forest and pondered the facts of the case. He should have acted at once. That much was clear to him. He should have given the rancher an equal choice of weapons, and then finished the matter at once. But, when he faced the other, he was held back by the terrible certainty that his skill with weapons was immeasurably superior to that of the man of money. Therefore he had fallen back upon the other expedient. He felt that he knew it would fail. Now he had a wait until the noon of the next day before him. Those hours of waiting there were not dull, however.

When he reached the trees he did not go far. Distance was not what he wanted for safety. He climbed straight up a tall tree and there he built for himself a sort of a crow's nest. It was not overly secure when the wind rose, as it did presently, and swayed the top of the tree back and forth with much violence. But from this position he could look through the thinned leaves of the trees before him and peer into the windows of the house of Crocker, which had so lately become the house of Wheeler, without as yet shaking off all of its original dignity.

At least he felt that he was fairly safe from discovery here. For who among the searchers, if searchers were sent, would dream of looking in a hiding place so childish as the top of a tree in order to discover the famous evader of the law—Hubert Dunleven?

What they all overlooked was that there was a great deal of childishness in the mind of this same Dunleven. So the man of crime sat secure and watched events happening with great speed. First, there was a rush of half a dozen mounted men from the house. If all the laborers around the house were not being sent to spread the warning, Dunleven felt that he had turned fool, unable to read the simplest letters of events as they were presented before him.

Presently more horsemen approached the house. They came in groups of

twos and threes. If these were not the answers to the summons which Mr. Wheeler had sent out, Dunleven felt that he was more a fool than ever.

The way toward the house passed directly under the tree where he had taken refuge. He found much amusement listening to the murmur of the voices that rose up to him. Then he heard one voice louder than the others, a deep and familiar sound: John Tipton!

He understood at once. The rumor of the threat which he had made against Wheeler had already circulated far and wide until it came to the ear of Tipton himself. The word of the ranger had been plighted to keep from the trail of Dunleven for three whole days. That word, as Dunleven very well knew, was inviolable. However, there was nothing in the promise of Tipton to keep him from occupying the position of a guard; now he was determined to take his post to protect Wheeler, in the profound hope that while he occupied that post the outlaw might come within gunshot of him.

Dunleven, understanding, shook his head. It trebled the already great difficulties of his task. The rest might be known men, many of them, but Tipton was Tipton—always a handful. Now he was added to the already heavy burden which Dunleven had to bear! No wonder, then, that he listened more keenly than ever as the voices of the two men rose slowly toward the tree.

"He thinks that Dunleven won't take a try at him until noon to-morrow. He's going to stay put in his room all of that time. And that's why he's sent for you. He wants you to sit in that room with him until the time comes. You understand? You're to have anything that you want, if you'll do it. And put your price high, I advise you. He can afford to pay!"

How perfectly in character was the voice of Tipton as it made answer: "It's only my duty that I'll be doing if I take charge of this game. There's no price to put on it. The State pays my wages, friend!"

The State paid his wages—small ones, too. Nothing on the side must come to Tipton. The man from Devon would have felt more than half corrupted if he had taken such money!

In the meantime a strange performance was beginning around the house of Wheeler. Half a dozen horsemen had started to walk their mounts around the big house, moving at regular intervals. Here was Tipton, come out to superintend their order. By the starlight the outlaw could distinguish perfectly the outlines of that big frame, and the seat a little aslant in the saddle.

Now Dunleven felt that he had seen enough. He knew that the maker of money had decided to break his word. He knew what measures Wheeler had taken to make sure of safety. He started to descend from the tree when he saw Tipton ride down the bridle path followed by four other men. Inner guards were not enough, it seemed. There was to be an outer picket, also. At least, it was in this fashion that Dunleven interpreted what he saw and heard. He climbed down to the lower branches of the tree and waited there.

The rain had begun to fall—rain cold enough for November, with rattling leaves winging through the trees now and again. Dunleven was chilled and wet, but still he did not stir while he strove to untangle the confusion of his thoughts. He was beginning to feel that defeat was certain.

He knew that without a miracle he could not break through that guard which was thrown around the house of the rich man. He knew, also, that he had no other way of getting at the money-lender unless he took wings and flew over the line of riders, or, like a mole, burrowed under the ground.

Since he could do neither of these things, he was about ready to admit defeat, climb down from the tree, regain his bay mare, and ride on his way. At this moment he heard the beating hoofs of a single strong-moving horse.

Dunleven listened, and then he looked through the deep dullness of the rain and the night and saw the big form of Tipton returning from his work with the outer guard.

He acted on impulse. Nothing else could have made him attempt such a hazardous action except sheerest impulse working upon a spirit highly irritated. When the rider passed beneath the tree, Dunleven cast himself down. He had not more than one chance in ten of striking the rider from that distance. If he missed, he would hit the ground and get some broken bones, if not a broken neck. Kind fortune favored him. It was the ranger that he struck, and the heavy impact crushed big Tipton to the ground from the saddle.

They landed with a shock that numbed the brain of the outlaw; it left the ranger senseless and helpless upon the ground. There crouched Dunleven in the rain wondering why he had done this thing and what good could come from it. He stared up after the fashion of bewildered men, and a fresh shower of big drops, shaken from the tree, struck his face. That dash of cold water brought home to him the first inkling of the thought for which he had been waiting.

First of all, he tied the hands of Tipton, and, as the ranger began to stir and groan, the outlaw gagged him securely, heaved him into the saddle on the horse, and, mounting behind, rode again down the lane.

He hoped to pass the outer line of pickets unseen, but, as he came near to the gate, the dim silhouette of a rider drew out of the rain.

There was a shout—but no bullet. Apparently the dimness of the night had been great enough to conceal the fact that there were two riders on the back of the ranger's horse. For the rest, what was to be suspected of a rider coming *from* the house of Wheeler?

Dunleven and his prisoner plunged down the road till it joined the main county road beyond the next bend, where the mail boxes glimmered faintly through the night. After that, the outlaw turned into a thick copse, where he had left the big, patient bay mare. Now, riding his own horse, his hand on the rein which guided that of the ranger, he made for a little deserted shack which he had noticed among the hills, earlier.

There he dismounted, and into the damp, dripping interior of the cabin he carried his helpless man. The horses were in the same shelter. In a moment more he had kindled a meager fire in a corner of the place.

It gave little more than a handful of flame. No heat, but light was what Dunleven wanted. While the ranger, with the gag removed mercifully from his lips, sat wondering in a corner of the shack, his captor produced a pen and a little batch of thin paper and envelopes, wrapped in oiled skin. He used a bit of rotten plank across his knees for a table, and he fell to working slowly, steadily.

Once he looked up and said: "Will you write something for me, old man? This cold has numbed my hand."

The ranger smiled. "I'll write nothing for you!" he said scornfully. "That's too old a trick, Dunleven."

Dunleven, with a sigh, went back to his work, and every letter was drawn with the most infinite care.

"I see," said the ranger at last. "First draft of a forgery, eh? Is that it, old-timer?"

The outlaw shrugged his shoulders. "For a ranger," said he, "you're pretty

near intelligent. Just miss out by a mite, I guess."

He looked up again a little later and said with a fierce scowl: "Out of all of this mess—have you still got any hopes of Nell Wooster?"

"None in the wide world," admitted the man of the law.

"Well," said Dunleven, "if I should manage to put her in your way so that you marry her, don't let that stand in your way. I expect you back on my trail. I wouldn't know what to do without you to liven things up!"

Once more he turned to his work, and this time it was making a copy of what he had first so carefully drawn out. Now, however, his hand did not move slowly. It spilled the letters easily from the end of the pen. He finished, looked at his work, compared it with the original, and then returned to his labor. Not once, but half a dozen times that work was repeated. It was a full two hours later that he looked up with a groan of relief.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY.

WHEN the mail was taken from the box of Wheeler early the next morning there was found an unstamped envelope addressed in a bold, strong scrawl. When Wheeler opened it, he read within:

DEAR WHEELER: This is scratched in haste. I am on the trail of great news for you, I think. That is why I have not come back to the house to-night, and why I don't intend to come. It may be that I shall be at your house before eleven o'clock. If not, I want you to come alone to the little shack in the hills south of your place—the one with the red paint on it—or paint that looks like it might have been red once. Try to get there not before noon, or you'll spoil my plans. Come alone. And you'll need a good horse and some straight-shooting guns. Sorry to make this sound mysterious, but you'll understand when you arrive. Adios,

JOHN TIPTON.

When Wheeler had read this over, he fell into a brown study. Then he called a guard and told him to ask all the other men who had been gathered there if any of them had ever been familiar with the handwriting of Tipton.

A red-headed man came in presently, saying that he had been a cook for a company of the rangers where Tipton served. He knew his writing well, and had had a chance to see a couple of reports that he sent in.

"Rum reports they was, too," said he, "and a standing joke in the company. Old Tipton would write in: 'Still trying for him.' And then sign his name. Or else he would write: 'Nearly got him. My wound will be well in a couple of weeks, and then I'll start again.' That would be his way of describing a fight where he'd nearly lost his life with a bunch of crooks."

"Look at this address. Is that Tipton's handwriting?"

"That's his," pronounced the other without hesitation. "I recollect it by the funny way that he had of making circles over his i's instead of dotting them. Same with the periods. Sure, that's his. And I'd swear to it. Have you got the word from the old boy at last?"

Those who knew Tipton had been anxious because of his disappearance.

"I've got word from him," admitted Wheeler gloomily. "That's all that I need you for."

He sat for a long time, pondering. This was not the sort of a letter that he would expect from Tipton. There was a note of braggadocio in it, almost. Certainly there was an air of gayety. He felt that the real Tipton would never have taken such a veil of mystery about himself. However, here was the letter as a bald fact, and its handwriting sworn to.

At eleven o'clock Chip Wheeler belted on his two best Colts and took

his truest rifle from the rack. But he had no intention of going alone. A man with money, he always felt, should know how to spend it with a wise profusion. A man with others to guard him was an idiot if he did not use them; so he picked out the three most celebrated shots in the little company which had responded to his danger call.

"Start out for the red shack, two miles back into the country, yonder," said Wheeler. "When you get there, hide yourself in the edge of the trees overlooking the shack. When you see me appear and go toward that house, have your guns at your shoulders and be all set for trouble. You hear me?"

They heard him, and they went. In the very edge of the woods they lay stretched while they saw Wheeler, just after the stroke of noon, when the shadows had drawn to nothingness beneath the straight-stemmed saplings, ride out into the clearing near the shack in a big Mackinaw, with his rifle balanced across the pommel of his saddle, and his head covered with a tall Mexican sombrero. They saw him ride to the door of the shack and dismount, and stride in—and they saw no more; they heard no more, for a time.

What Wheeler saw at the door of the shack was only a blankly empty interior. He spoke once, gently, and again, aloud. Then, muttering an oath at such foolery, he stepped into the shack—and found the cold muzzle of a gun clamped against the side of his head! He looked askance—and into the eyes of Dunleven.

"You've come to die," said Dunleven.

"Bah," said Wheeler, pale but calm. "I have enough money to buy off ten like you, even if I have broken my word to you. All right, Dunleven. I know you, and I'll pay big if I have to!"

"Will you?" asked Dunleven, smiling. "I tell you there is one language that money don't talk. There is one thing that money won't say. Ask him—he knows!"

He pointed, and the charmed eyes of Wheeler saw Tipton tied to a post, hand and foot and back, with a gag between his teeth.

"This," went on Dunleven calmly, "is knife work—because you have your men waiting out yonder, and I don't want them to hear a gunshot. But if you'll give me your blackguardly word again to fight like a man, knife to knife, I'll put aside this gun. And there's a witness who'll be alive after your death, Wheeler, to tell whether you fought like a man or whined like the dog that you really are!"

He pointed again to Tipton. There was nothing but rage and horror in the eyes of the ranger.

And so he rested his hand on the butt of his own hunting knife.

Afterward, three impatient men saw a man in a Mackinaw and a tall Mexican sombrero step from the door of the shack, mount the horse of Wheeler, and ride away.

They thought he was a little shorter and wider of shoulder. But they were not there to make too many comments. Ten minutes later they closed on the cabin in disgust and there they found Tipton with a white face, still bound and gagged! There lay Wheeler upon his back, dead. His hands were folded across the breast which the knife had pierced. His eyes were peacefully closed by the thoughtful hand of the outlaw.

That was the reason that Tipton resigned from the rangers.

He said to Nell Wooster on the day that she promised to marry him: "He did it mostly for your sake, partly for my sake, and partly for his own. And what he did was bigger than anything that I could ever do by catching him."

"Aye, a thousand, thousand times!" said Nell Wooster.

"And do you know the reason it was so big?" asked the ex-ranger.

"It was so brave, so generous, so wonderfully——"

"I think," said Tipton, "that he loved you, too. Otherwise, no criminal could have done such a decent thing!"

He almost regretted having said that, when he saw her eyes grow wide and her look turn far off into the distance toward a new idea. But his own heart was too great and too open to harbor such thoughts for long. He sent in his horse and his guns to the Texas Rangers and he swore that he would never ride in a man hunt again.

"For Heaven's sake, Tipton," wrote back his captain, "are you giving up a career you were born to? All your people have done this sort of work!"

He wrote back the one eloquent letter of his life:

"They didn't know what I know—what money can't buy, and what money can't say!"

"And what do you mean by that?" asked the despairing captain.

Tipton's answer was a mere post card.

Come to my house and see!

That was the end of the trail which, you may say, began five generations before.

ANCIENT CITY FOUND IN NEVADA

TWENTY miles west of Pioche, Nevada, near White Horse Springs, field members of the National Cosmograph Society recently discovered signs of a buried city antedating anything heretofore found in this country. Two and a half miles of heiroglyphics chiseled in an obsidian cliff were among the discoveries. There were also quantities of pottery, with an unusually thick fire glaze and decorations in black closely resembling Chinese characters.

JULIA LITTLE SNAKE QUITS HER JOB

THE only little thing about Julia Little Snake is the second word of her name. Julia is a Ponca Indian girl and she weighs four hundred and fifty pounds. Her occupation is that of a fat woman in a circus side show, but she has recently quit that job and returned to her home in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Julia's objection to circus work is the hardness of the seats on which she is obliged to rest her huge bulk for many hours at a stretch during the performances.

OLD NEVADA PROSPECTOR PASSES ON

A PICTURESQUE figure in the Nevada of the early days was Lawrence Ryan, who recently died in the Nye County Hospital at Tonopah, Nevada. Ryan was seventy-eight years of age and had participated in every mining boom staged in Nevada during the past fifty years. Although he was among the first in several spectacular stampedes, he never made the stake that was the object of his ambitions.

Sam and the Thirsty Cowboys

BY Robert Ormond Case

Author of "The Fence Across the Canyon," etc.

IN the mellowness of evening, the cow hands of the vast McTavish holdings sprawled on the broad veranda and steps of the bunk house of the home ranch. Three or four reclined on the long bench against the wall. Others were draped in more or less comfortable postures against the posts, or resting on elbow and hip on the floor itself. Cigarettes glowed through the gloom, and thin spirals of smoke rose dimly in the still air.

Hunched like a great toad on the broad step, his elbows resting on his ample knees, was Sam "Dynamite" Smith, latest addition to the hard-bitten McTavish crew. He was a vast youth of some nineteen or twenty years, bulging and bulbous in all proportions, thick-limbed and deep-chested. One great, tawny lock of hair hung low over blue eyes that were oddly keen in contrast with his heavy face. His size, alone, would have made him conspicuous in the harsh environment of the Condon country, for in that region men have a tendency to leanness. Sam had other characteristics which, to the hard-bitten cow hands, were as refreshing as they were unique.

The colossal youth had arrived in the Condon country several months before, knowing nothing of that vast region lying between the Cascades and the Rockies. At first, it had appealed to him as a harsh and hostile environment, peopled with men whose ways he did not understand. Several brief but lurid contacts with environment and men had created in him a desire to take his place on equal terms among the lean and capable gentlemen who blithely rode the great cattle range.

Certain obstacles had at first stood in the path of this ambition. But Sam's ignorance was equaled only by his determination. Finally he had achieved the goal. Ten days before, there had occurred a spectacular encounter with McTavish himself, gaunt and hard-boiled proprietor of one of the largest outfits of the section. So impressed

had McTavish been with Sam's prowess and sincerity of purpose in that imbroglio, that he had hired him forthwith. The thrill of that moment Sam felt could come but once in a lifetime. He was now a cowboy.

Upon his arrival from Condon and reporting for duty, Sam had been looked upon with suspicion by the McTavish cow hands. He had appeared so obviously soft and unseasoned, so colossal and guileless of countenance withal, they had decided somewhat too hurriedly that he was in the parlance of the cow country—a blank. Other men, it appeared, of equal judgment and discrimination, had likewise made the same mistakes in too hastily judging the youth's capabilities. His inexperience was obvious, and this the colossal youth did not attempt to conceal. It was, in fact, exaggerated by the bluff and manful manner he had adopted. Yet he had speedily demonstrated that, concealed beneath his deceivingly colossal exterior, were certain explosive potentialities that had earned for him the title of "Dynamite."

The preceding ten days, during which the crew had moved the main herd from the brakes of the John Day to a high and remote region known as the Blue Meadows Range, had been, for Sam, a lurid and breath-taking interval. Previously, he had not dreamed that men of flesh and blood could have performed the feats in which he participated as part of the daily routine. He had learned the excruciating torment of eighteen and twenty hours in the saddle. He had tasted the burning dust of high noon in the wake of the milling herd; twelve hours later, on night watch beneath the glittering stars, he had shiveringly called in vain upon his memory of that suffocating heat.

He had learned much of the ways of cattle and cow ponies. He had greedily obsorbed details of technique in handling the herd, in turning back shaggy mavericks in whose rolling eyes gleamed an implacable determination to leave their fellows and depart for the open range. He had learned to sleep with his saddle for a pillow and to dine luxuriously and without comment upon whatever rations the chuck wagon provided.

After ten days, Sam considered himself an old-timer. He did not realize that he knew nothing of the personal characteristics of his fellow cow hands, save that they were a hard-riding, reckless, and good-natured band. He did not realize, in his ignorance of the breed, that experienced craftsmen who worked together like the parts of an efficient machine in the duties of the range, were individuals of another type in moments of relaxation. He did not know that to them, excitement was meat and drink, and inactivity was singularly irksome.

The crew had arrived at the home ranch late that afternoon. To Sam, this return to a restful environment after the terrific activity of the preceding days, was pleasant indeed. He was saddle weary; he felt crippled in devious ways from his harsh experiences. Every bone and ligament of his body seemed to have stored up fatigue. He had assumed without question that the rest of the crew felt likewise.

As he sat in the gloom on the lower step, deeply searching for sufficient stamina to heave himself erect and retire to the bunk house, he was astonished to observe certain of the cow hands stirring restlessly on the veranda.

"This outfit's getting me down," complained a freckled youth with a brown cigarette drooped across his reckless lips. "Expect we'll stick around here for a couple of days with nothing to do. Ain't that a pleasing prospect to stare a man in the face? I figure on doing a little fancy work to kind of keep my mind occupied—only I done lost my knitting needles."

"Keeping your mind occupied ain't

such a hefty problem," retorted another. "You ain't got any. Your hoss does your thinking for you, 'Red,' and you hadn't ought to make us believe different. Whereas, you done advanced an idea at that. We can play marbles, maybe, or roll a hoop."

"The worst of it is, we ain't got any liquor," complained a third.

"Gosh," said Sam, grinning toward the speakers, "you fellers are certainly energetic. I should think you'd want to rest after the hard work we've done in the last few days. I'm so tired I could sleep for a week, if I was able to get to my bunk."

"You'll get used to it, son," said "Nevada," a wizened old-timer, product of earlier and more lurid days in the cattle country. "You follow riding very long, and you'll be in the same kind of shape as these lads here. You'll get so you won't feel at home less you're bedded down on cactus, where the sand fleas are the thickest. You won't enjoy your meals less you're eating cougar meat. You won't be happy less you're wrestling with a wild cat or shaking hands with a sidewinder. Yeah, these hairy-chested hombres are tough, they's no question about it. They admit it." Grinning through the gloom, Nevada bit into a black plug of tobacco with emphasis. "It's surprising, too, how brainless they get after a while. You know how it is, if a fellow was to stop using his arm it would get paralyzed on him and after a while he couldn't use it at all. Well, that's what happens when a feller rides very long. He's plumb paralyzed from the ears up. He don't know nothin' except cows and horses and such. Did I ever tell you about the sorrowful buckaroo that went to a dance?"

"Nevada," cut in one of his listeners sternly, "you tell that yarn again, and there's going to be a massacre. The first time I heard it, it sounded like a pretty fair yarn, but the fifth time you sprung it on me, I quit laughing. The forty-second time you told it, it didn't seem to have no point at all."

"He come to a dance, this buckaroo," continued Nevada firmly.

"Hold on!" cried the other, a vast menace in his voice. "How about it, men? Do we aim to sit here and listen to that chin-whiskered yarn again without doing nothing to protect ourselves? It ain't right, is it?" There was a raucous chorus of agreement. "You've done heard the verdict, Nevada."

"I ain't told it but a couple of times," protested Nevada, aggrieved. "Dynamite, here, is entitled to get a laugh out of it."

"Aw, shucks," said Sam, "leave him tell it. I don't believe I've heard it yet."

"Oh, all right," agreed the spokesman, relenting. "Once more won't hurt us no worse, eh men? Dynamite here is just a young feller trying to get along. He might just as well get it now as later, huh?"

"This buckaroo come to a dance," said Nevada, leaning impressively toward Sam; "he was a melancholy critter that was in the habit of looking kind of ailing and downcast. But this time, when he shows up at the festivities, the boys could see right away that something worse than usual had happened to him. In the first place, he hadn't brought his wife with him. He was a married man, you understand."

"That's one thing I always said was hay wire about that yarn," cut in Red critically, "him being a married man that a way. Anybody with a gleam of human intelligence would know they ain't any gal in her right mind would get hooked up with a no-count cowpuncher. But continue, Nevada; I don't aim to make a point of it."

"He was a married man," insisted Nevada. "And when he comes to the dance without his wife, and looking so discouraged and all, several of the boys

gathered around him and one of them says to him, sympatheticlike: 'Sorrowful, what ails you? You look plumb peaked and down in the mouth.'

" 'I done lost my wife,' says this melancholy lad.

" 'Don't tell us,' they says, real shocked. 'How did it happen?'

" 'It was awful, men,' says this sad hombre. 'We was out riding this morning, and her horse stepped in a gopher hole and threw her. It didn't hurt the horse none, but my poor wife busted her leg. *So I had to shoot her.*' "

An appreciative titter greeted this anecdote, but Sam stared blankly at the speaker.

"What did he shoot her for?" he demanded, obviously puzzled. "Why didn't he take her to a hospital?"

Howls of delighted laughter greeted this question. Nevada stared at Sam, his jaw dropping. His mortification intensified the paroxysms of mirth that shook the broad veranda.

As the merriment subsided, the cowpunchers examined the colossal youth with new interest. After all, they knew nothing of Sam, save that his physical courage and energy were above question. The terrific activity of the previous ten days had offered little chance for personal contact. Green and unseasoned though he obviously was, they had accepted him because of his sincerity of purpose and willingness to do more than his share. Many things can be forgiven a man whose heart is sound.

It now occurred to them that they had not yet plumbed the depths of Sam's inexperience. His profound ignorance, as revealed by his naïve query, opened up a new and delightful prospect. The forthcoming period of inactivity might not prove so monotonous after all. As though an unspoken suggestion had made itself felt, there was a slight but gentle shifting of position as the group focused their attention on Sam through the gloom.

"Listen," said Nevada, crestfallen but still determined, "that one maybe didn't appeal to you. Here's one that aims to show how thirsty a cow-puncher gets, who lives out in them wide-open spaces too long. They was a buckaroo who found a gallon demijohn——"

"Wait a second," Sam interposed. "About this other buckaroo—you mean he was so dumb he thought he had to shoot the lady because she had broken her leg? That's what you meant, huh?"

"Oh, sure," said Nevada wearily. "Now about this thirsty lad that found the gallon demijohn——"

"Don't talk about it," pleaded Red. "This is the wrong time to spring that one, Nevada. I'm so dry I'm a human cinder. Why, say, if you was to tell that demijohn yarn, I'd have to go out and eat a handful of dust to wet my tongue. Dynamite," he addressed Sam accusingly, "you've done fallen down on the job. As new hand on this outfit, don't you know you're supposed to rustle up a little liquid refreshment for the boys?"

"I ain't a drinking man," said Sam; "so I didn't bring any drinking liquor with me. Of course," he added casually, "I got a little whisky in my suit case that I fetched along for emergencies. You know what I mean, snake bite and so forth."

The effect of this announcement was electrical. His listeners were apparently stricken dumb by its staggering import. Through the gloom unbelieving eyes turned upon him, reproachful, accusing, almost scornful eyes. Shipwrecked mariners, existing for weary months on a desert island on a diet of seaweed and clams, could not have gazed more caustically upon one of their number who had casually announced that he had previously cached a barrel of biscuits against a hungry day.

"Sweet Maria," muttered a guarded voice, "he's got a little hooch in his suit case, he says. My gosh, men, have you

ever heard tell of anything as low-down as that? For ten days it's been lying there, and he ain't never said a word about it. All the while we've been treating him like a white man. Dynamite, how do you get that way?"

"But it's medicine," protested the colossal youth defensively. "I've got a bottle of liniment, too, that's good for sprains and bruises, and so forth. I wasn't trying to hide it on you fellows. I never mentioned it because there wasn't any occasion to. You fellows are welcome to any of that stuff whenever you need it real bad."

"Need it real bad!" echoed a yearning voice. "Fellow, do you hear that rasping sound? That ain't dead leaves on the roof of the bunk house. That's me, licking my parched lips."

Having recovered from their first surprise, the cow hands scrambled to their feet and approached Sam. That youth found himself the center of an ingratiating circle that gazed upon him affectionately. In the moonlight, their lean, tan faces were clothed with a dignified friendliness. Nevada, being nearest to him, had secured a point of vantage by the simple process of sliding along the step toward him. The old reprobate now laid an eager hand upon Sam's arm.

"Listen, son," he pleaded. "I'm a friend of yours, ain't I? I've always treated you right, huh?"

"Oh, sure," agreed Sam instantly; "all you boys have treated me fine, and I appreciate it."

"You're an understanding sort of a cuss, Dynamite," averred Nevada. His voice shook a little. "I don't know as I ever told you about my rheumatism, how awful it is. It's getting me here in my back and my hips. I ain't the kind of a feller that says much about it, you understand. Maybe you wondered why I was joshing so much tonight, telling stories and so forth? Well, sir, that's the way I do when the rheumatism hits me the worst. I got to talk to cover up my misery." Looking at him closely, Sam saw that Nevada's tremendously seamed and hickory-colored features did indeed appear to be twisted with pain. "You don't know how bad I feel, Dynamite. Maybe you could give me a little something or other, huh?"

"I sure will," agreed Sam, rising somewhat stiffly to his feet. "You should have told me about it sooner. I'll unpack those suit cases of mine and get out that liniment. It's awful good for rheumatism. The bottle, that I took it out of, had the directions printed right on the outside. It had a list of all the things this liniment was good for. Rheumatism was one of them."

"Hold on a second." Despite his alleged crippled condition, Nevada followed closely on Sam's heels as that youth strode heavily across the veranda and into the bunk house, elbowing aside others of the group who crowded in. "You got me wrong, Dynamite. I'm older than you, and I've picked up a thing or two about medicine. Liniment is no good for the brand of rheumatism I've got. A shot of whisky is the only thing that seems to ease it at all."

"No, you're absolutely wrong," said Sam firmly. "Whisky is good for only one thing, and that's snake bite. If you was to drink any of it now, it would aggravate your condition. No, sir, if you don't want to use that liniment, I can't do anything for you."

Arriving at his bunk, the youth stooped and dragged forth his pair of suit cases. These he placed on the bnuk before him and fumbled at the fastening. A buckaroo in the rear hastened to light the oil lamp and place it in the bracket on the wall.

"I guess I better unpack these things anyway," Sam remarked to the watchful group that hedged him in. "I've only got a pint," he told Nevada. "That

wouldn't do you any good. You'd just get drunk on it, and your rheumatism wouldn't be any better."

"What? Me get drunk on a pint?" Nevada fairly bristled at the suggestion. "Why, say, young fellow, a pint wouldn't be much more than an appetizer."

A hairy hand laid hold of Nevada and pulled him back. His place on the battle line was taken by the towering "Slim."

"Dynamite," said Slim, casting a disapproving glance at the rest of the waiting cow hands, "them buzzards ain't to be trusted. Slip me that whisky, and I'll protect it for you. You don't know these hyenas as well as I do. You leave that medicine laying around, and, first thing you know, it will show up missing. Leave me take care of it for you, and I'll guarantee to put it in a safe place."

This bland sugestion brought forth a loud chorus of disapproval.

"I'll bet you would," agreed the cow hands raucously. "Yeah, he'd put it in a safe place all right. Slim, go to the foot of the class. Your line's as hay wire as Nevada's."

Sam quieted the disturbance with a gesture.

"You're wrong, Slim," he said. "You know as well as I do that those boys are perfectly honest. I'd trust them with my last cent. You hadn't ought to talk about them like that. A fellow's property is as safe here as if it was in a bank."

The cow hands nodded solemn approval. They stared coldly and accusingly at Slim, who was regarding Sam, open-mouthed.

"Sink your teeth in that, Slim," said Red, grinning. "If them sentiments don't make you feel like a low-down maverick, you ain't human."

"Why," said Sam, warming to his theme, "I wouldn't be afraid to leave that liquor right out in plain sight. I'll bet there isn't a man in this crew would touch it unless I gave him permission —only unless an emergency came up when it was absolutely necessary. That is, with the possible exception of Nevada there." Sam added this with the air of one forced to make an unwilling concession to human frailty. "He's probably drunk so much liquor in the past it kind of warps his judgment."

"Don't worry none about me," muttered Nevada bitterly. "I ain't as active as I was once. The boys would probably tramp me to death getting at that said liquor. Yeah, sure, go on and leave it out here where we can get a good look at it."

The grinning faces of the cow hands were touched with more than a hint of suspicion. Surely no one in the world, even of the huge youth's inexperience, would be so guileless and trusting.

"Leave that hooch out in plain sight, will he?" muttered a thirsty cow hand in the rear to his neighbor. "That big boy's kidding us. He might just as well turn a hungry shote into a corn crib and say: 'There's a lot of corn, but I know dang well you ain't the kind of a hawg that would eat any of it.'"

Ordinarily, the amount of extra clothing Sam had brought with him—a neatly pressed suit, dress shirts, neckties, and other paraphernalia, would have caused considerable facetious comment. But the attention of all the spectators was directed on the bottled goods which must presently be disclosed. Methodically, Sam disposed of his belongings, hanging certain clothing on pegs on the wall and folding others neatly and permanently in the suit cases. Certain toilet articles were placed on a small shelf that some previous occupant had built on the wall at a convenient distance above the bunk.

The entire group froze into immobility as Sam pushed aside his personal effects and disclosed two bottles. One of these was a receptacle of blue glass of the soda pop variety. The other

was a pint flask filled with a pale-amber liquid that again caused the spectators to lick their parched lips.

Sam lifted the blue bottle from its nest and held it aloft.

"There you are, boys," he said, grinning. "Any time you get bit by a snake, you can just take a shot of it. I'm going to do just like I said—leave it out in plain sight."

He placed it on the narrow shelf back of the toilet articles. It did not escape his eagle-eyed watchers that, as he talked, with his free hand he thrust the pint flask out of sight, closing the suit case upon it.

"Yeah," said Red, eying Sam unwinkingly, "and suppose we was to need a little liniment?"

"I'll leave the liniment in the suit case," said Sam. "Any time one of you boys get a bruise or a sprain just let me know. It's mighty good liniment. Mr. McQuirk gave it to me. He had a big bottle of it, so he filled up that old whisky flask and told me to take it along."

Sam lifted the suit case with its trailing straps, and slid it carefully under the bunk.

"And I expect," said Red with sarcastic intent that passed entirely over Sam's head, "your friend, McQuirk, also gave you that bottle of hooch, eh?"

He pointed at the blue bottle looming solemnly on the shelf.

"Yes," said Sam grinning, his keen eyes inspecting the faces about him, "Mr. McQuirk had a quart which he kept for snake bite. So he filled up this pop bottle and told me to take it along. He said I'd likely meet up with some snakes sooner or later."

"True enough," agreed Red, eying the suit case beneath the bunk longingly. "The woods is full of them."

Sam seated himself on the edge of his bunk, yawning prodigiously. Unwillingly, the cow hands turned away. They did not retire for the evening to their bunks, but stood in a group, whispering, their glances roving toward the corner where the vast youth was sleepily making preparations to retire.

"We got to get at that suit case, men," said one. "Question is, how shall we do it? That overgrown hombre isn't as dumb as he looks. That was a sneaky one, wasn't it, putting the liniment out on the shelf and caching the hooch in the suit case? It showed he's laying for us. It would give him a great laugh if some one was to grab that liniment off the shelf and take a good shot of it."

"Let's gang up on him," suggested another. "Four or five of us ought to keep him interested, while the rest of us drag out the suit cases, grab the hooch, and get out into the open."

"Nothing doing," remurred the first. "That buzzard looks fat, but so does a grizzly bear. They wouldn't be no furniture left by the time we got through, and the hooch would probably be busted beside. Then we'd all be darned glad to get a hold of the liniment, we'd be that crippled. No, sir. We've got to use what you might call finesse."

"By gravy, I've got an idea," whispered Red, chuckling hoarsely. "We'll all move over around his bunk, friendly as a flock of Mexican buzzards watching a bull fight. Nevada can start one of them continuous yarns of his. While Dynamite's listening to the more or less interesting details, Slim here, being built like a snake, can ease under the bunk from the end and drag out that there suit case, get a hold of the said liquid nourishment, and ease himself outdoors. Then, while Dynamite's laughing himself into hysterics over Nevada's humorous efforts, we'll all follow Slim."

"Where do I get off?" demanded Nevada belligerently. "I don't trust you birds no farther than I could throw an elephant by the tail. If you fellows don't leave me a good healthy snort

out of that pint, there's going to be a fight. Nothing less than three fingers will satisfy me."

"Don't you worry, old-timer." Red spoke with an appearance of great earnestness—yet each of the conspirators was eying each other with suspicion. "There ain't a man in this crowd that'd hog all that liquor himself. Each of us will get enough to wet his tongue. Now then, Nevada, you'd best tell him that one about the buckaroo that went into the restaurant. That ought to hold him. He thinks cow hands is awful tough, and that yarn will prove it. All set? Let's go then."

In his disrobing process, Sam had not progressed beyond scratching his head and staring at his boots. He eyed the solemn crew good-naturedly, as they gathered around him. The bunk groaned beneath their combined weight. Nevada was at his side.

"Dynamite," said the latter, "the boys has agreed to let me tell you one more yarn. It's about a hungry buckaroo that went into a restaurant. You want to hear it?"

"Sure," said Sam. "I'll bet it's a good one."

"Well, sir," said Nevada, looking past Sam and striving to follow the actions of Slim, who, hidden from Sam's view by the crowding cow hands, was gradually lowering out of sight, like the gaunt mast of a ship disappearing from the horizon. "This buckaroo took some beef to town. The critters was delivered. He thought he'd best look the town over before going back to the sagebrush and sand fleas. So he limps along the boulevard. After he's been pushed around for a spell, and the crowd has tramped on his toes, and he's been kicked out of a Turkish bath, him thinking it was a harem, and has got a crick in his neck from looking at the tall buildings, he claims he craves nourishment. So he eases into a restaurant and throws his legs under a table.

"Well, sir, while he's waiting for some service, a couple of asphalt Arabs strolled in, dainty, white-faced, slick-haired lads, wearing spats and with hands like lady barbers. These lilies of the field slides themselves gracefully up to a table alongside and gaze upon our hero from the sagebrush, like he was a hairy ape that had dropped down kind of sudden from the tree tops. Our woolly friend looks at them kind of red-eyed and can hardly keep himself from growling.

"Then the waiter breezes up. He stops beside these lollipops and says 'What'll you have.'

"'Give me a tiny porterhouse,' says the first sheik, kind of languid, 'medium well done and smothered with mushrooms, some creamed asparagus tips, a demitasse of coffee with a dash of whipped cream. For dessert, a half portion of that exquisite custard.'

"The buckaroo feels himself getting hot under the collar. He wonders why the waiter don't slap him on the wrist. But the second lily is ordering.

"'One small veal cutlet,' he says, somewhat bored, 'three string beans. A side order of milk toast. For a beverage, I desire a little chocolate, and for dessert, a stewed fig.'

"The waiter writes it down and comes over to our buckaroo. 'Brother,' he says, 'what's yours?'

"'Beef,' says the buckaroo, gritting his teeth.

"'How'll you have it?'

"'Aw,' says the buckaroo, '*just cripple it and drive it in.*'"

The infinite disgust and animosity which Nevada imparted to the last speech convulsed his hearers, notwithstanding that they had heard the anecdote on numberless previous occasions. There was even a hoarse chuckle that echoed hollowly and somewhat astonishingly from beneath the bunk.

"That was funny," Sam said, his broad face split with an enormous grin.

"I got the point of that one all right. He was so used to cooking his own beefsteak that he forgot himself, even in a restaurant, huh?"

One by one, hilarious cow hands were stricken dumb as the meaning of the tremendous youth's words came home to them. They stared at each other unbelievingly. Then with one accord, they fell into new convulsions, tears streaming down their tanned faces.

"You're there, Dynamite," cried Red, clapping the broad back of that grinning youth. "Danged if you ain't a gent that understands a good story."

"Some of these days," predicted Nevada, his eyes gleaming, "when you're riding among the pinnacles, a rock as big as a horse is going to fall on your head. With your sense of humor, that will undoubtedly strike you as funny. You'll laugh so hard you'll fall apart in chunks. Yes, sir, and I'll be right there, and your laugh won't be no louder than mine when I bury you."

Sam might have made reply to this venomous prophecy, but at that moment his attention was attracted elsewhere. As he leaned ponderously forward to gaze at the floor, the cow hands followed his glance. To their horror, they saw that the heel of the youth's right foot was resting squarely on a loose strap of the suit case beneath the bunk. That some strain was being applied to this strap, as though it was being pulled away firmly but surreptitiously, was evident.

It was also evident that Sam was confused and puzzled by this phenomenon. He rose to his feet suddenly, stooped, and laid hold of the strap. He stepped back to drag out the suit case—but he was forced to take several backward steps to bring into view the complete length of the towering Slim, who slid forth from beneath the bunk on his back, the shank of his spur caught in the handle of the suit case.

"Slim," said Sam, staring accusingly down at the prostrate cow-puncher, "I'm surprised at you. What were you doing under my bunk?"

Slim was a gentleman of iron nerve and agile mind. Grumbling profanely, he disentangled himself and rose to his feet.

"I was laughing at Nevada's hay-wire yarn," he explained. "When I'm laughing, I kick up my heels. Well, sir, my heels was under the bunk and my spur got caught on your danged suit case. Before I could kick myself loose, you snaked me clean under the bunk."

"I see," said Sam, though somewhat doubtfully. "Your legs must be longer than they look, Slim. I couldn't figure what was happening."

Red's fertile mind meanwhile had seized upon a new strategem whereby Sam might be lured from the vicinity of the liquor. When it had become apparent that the youth, himself, had accidentally foiled their previous designs, he had withdrawn unnoticed to the doorway. They now observed him, leaning against the frame, staring out toward the moonlight pinnacles. His loud sigh broke the silence that had followed Sam's last remark.

"Boys," proclaimed Red in a somewhat hushed voice, "I'm only a low-down cowboy that is supposed to have the delicate feelings of a wart hog. But you'd ought to come and cast your eye over them pinnacles yonder. If this ain't the most beautiful night since the time of the harvest ball in Condon, I'll throw in with you. Dynamite, you've got the education. You've been to high school and know a thing or two about poetry and such. Come and give it a look."

Sam, in whom such sentiments invariably struck a responsive chord, obediently moved forward. A part of the group moved with him. Slim remained behind. Sam was somewhat touched by the situation. Here, indeed, was ample proof that the uncouth exterior of the

hard-bitten cow hands served but to conceal their hearts of gold. Unquestionably the inner man was as keenly appreciative of the sublime and the beautiful, primitive and unformed as this appreciation might be.

As he gained the doorway, the quiet of the interior of the bunk house was shattered by explosive action, profane and colossal.

"Stampede!" yelled an excited voice. "Slim's got it. Go get him, cowboys."

Sam whirled to look. The suit case was lying open, its contents scattered on the floor. The elongated Slim was partly through the open window in the bunk-house wall. One booted and spurred leg waved wildly in the air. The other was grasped firmly by Nevada, who was striving manfully to retain his prisoner until help should arrive.

"Come and get him, men," he bawled. "The maverick don't aim to split with us."

Before the cow hands had reached the spot, the perfidious Slim freed himself with a mighty wrench and disappeared from view.

"What's going on?" demanded Sam, blinking. "What's the idea?"

There was no reply. Like stampeding cattle, the cow hands surged for the door, pushing Sam aside in their eagerness. Wild yells filled the night.

In the wake of the frenzied crew, Sam leaped forth from the bunk house into the glittering moonlight. Slim was heading up the slope toward the feed racks, his long legs covering the ground at ungainly but prodigious speed. Cow hands trailed him like wolves in full cry. Last of the trailing band was Nevada, whose age and general decrepitness left him farther and farther in the rear. For a few paces that worthy strove mightily to keep up. Then he halted, overcome with the futility of his endeavors, and tore his bandanna from his neck. This article of apparel he cast on the ground and leaped upon it, stamping it into the dust. At the same time, he called upon the high heavens to witness his utter lack of faith in all mankind.

Sam galloped up and laid hold of the raging old-timer.

"What ails those fellows, Nevada? What's it all about?"

"The polecats," cried Nevada, "the double-crossing hyenas! Just because I'm old and crippled, they pull a dirty deal like this. They figured me out of it all the while. What's it all about?" He turned on Sam savagely and snapped calloused fingers under his nose. "You big ham, they took that said liquor out of your blasted suit case. That's what. Laugh that off, will you?"

Sam turned away and dashed heavily up the slope. "Come back, you robbers," he bellowed.

His voice could not penetrate the din of battle that raged around the feed rack. He halted to watch. Events had now moved beyond his control.

With the precious flask held tightly in his grasp, Slim headed instinctively for the saddle horses. It was obvious that he must put distance between himself and his pursuers, if he hoped to enjoy his prize undisturbed. The ethics of the situation troubled him not in the least. He knew that each of his fellows, if given the opportunity, would have done the same. It was a case of every man for himself.

Into the quiet row of horses munching at the feed racks, he charged, with the hilarious but grimly determined pursuers hard at his heels. Bedlam broke loose among the astonished horses. Out of the pitching, squealing mêlée, Slim arose upon the back of a lean-barreled roan whose rolling eyes and flattened ears bespoke his utter disapproval of the abrupt assault. Given a little time, Slim would not have selected the roan, for the animal was of a highly suspicious and fastidious nature, resentful of just such undignified encounters as this

—but he had had no time to choose. Hoping for the best, yet fearing the worst, he clutched the bottle and urged the roan to depart hence, and immediately.

The roan showed instantly that he had no intention of departing. With his long legs wrapped about the animal's lean barrel, and with his free hand grasping his mane, Slim managed to retain his seat. His triumphant pursuers urged the plunging roan to greater effort, yelling, waving their arms, and stamping on the ground.

Slim looked about him desperately. His stubbornness forbade him to yield up the prize too easily. He knew that as soon as he was unseated, if the flask was still intact, his fellows would pounce upon him and wrest it from his grip. He knew, furthermore, that he could not hope to weather the storm when the roan got down to real business.

At the peak of the wild lunge that threw him, Slim cast the bottle away, hurling it with all his strength. He made his throw from a standing position as calmly as though something more substantial than ten feet of thin air were below him. The ruthless spectators did not watch him fall. Their eyes followed the flight of the bottle. It gyrated in a long arc some fifty feet distant, and plunged into a straw stack.

The lines of pursuit now converged on the straw stack. Slim, picking himself up from the dust, brought up the rear. At first glance, it seemed that the first man who reached the straw stack would also be the first to lay hands on the flask. Slim had wrought better than he knew. The bottle had buried itself in the loose straw. Like energetic terriers digging for ground squirrels, the cow hands plunged into the straw. Chaff flew in clouds about them. Several burrowed entirely from sight.

This time it was Red who burst forth, like a hibernating bear clawing his way to freedom. Grasping the flask in one hand and shaking the débris from his clothing as he ran, he headed for the pinnacles. Two or three frenzied searchers saw him go. Their warning yells brought forth others, trailing straw as they ran. The pack was again in full cry.

Slim's experience had impressed Red with the advisability of traveling afoot. He dashed forward toward the towering ramparts that hedged in the valley to the south. His plan of campaign immediately became evident. Being light and exceedingly fleet of foot, he hoped to outdistance his pursuers before achieving the rocky wall. This would give him time to scramble up to a point of vantage on the face of the cliff, which his less active fellows could not hope to attain. To free his hands for this purpose, he placed the flask in his hip pocket as he ran.

His plan would undoubtedly have been successful, were it not for an unfortunate happening at the foot of the cliff. The place Red had chosen for his ascent toward the glittering stars was at an indentation in the mighty wall. At the base of the cliff at this point was an old cistern, some eight feet deep by twenty feet in diameter, covered with rotting timbers. The cistern, long since abandoned, was dry. Its solid bottom was covered with a débris of vegetation and sand. As Red leaped upon the ancient reservoir, prepared to flit nimbly up the rugged wall beyond, the rotting timbers beneath his feet gave way. With a hoarse yell of astonishment, he disappeared from view.

This unexpected turn of luck was greeted with yells of delight from the trailing cow hands. Somewhat breathless from their dash up the slope, they swarmed one by one upon the cistern and followed Red into the depths. Immediately, sounds of a titanic struggle arose. Its echoes reverberated as from the bowels of the earth.

Red had alighted on hands and knees. The bottle in his hip pocket was still intact. Into the blackness of the pit, men dropped upon him and bore him to earth. In the darkness, no man could see his fellow. It was a mêlée in which the ownership of the flask was purely problematical, since the contestants were guided by a sense of touch only.

Up from the mass of writhing bodies, the dauntless Slim arose. Once more, the flask was in his grasp. Mentally he vowed that henceforth no man should detach it from him. Mounting a human pyramid formed of the bodies of his struggling adversaries, he leaped up and grasped the timbers above him. Too late they sensed his departure and grasped at his legs, swinging pendulum-like above. Slim, with a tremendous contortion, hitched his body into the open air and was gone.

Slim had acquired wisdom from his previous experience. Safety did not lie in the plains nor in the pinnacles. He accordingly headed for the river. When the last of the cow hands succeeded in disengaging himself from the blackness of the cistern, he was to be seen, sprinting past the breaking pen toward the river bank.

Had it been other than Slim who had finally secured the flask, several of the less determined cow hands would have given up the pursuit—but he had been the arch conspirator of them all. It was too much for human nature to permit him to enjoy the spoils unmolested. Doggedly, they charged down the slope in pursuit.

The sagacious Slim had decided to ford the river at the shallows. His towering physique would enable him to perform a feat more difficult for his shorter fellows. His equally crafty pursuers divined his intentions. They accordingly spread out fanwise, cutting off his retreat to the east and west. Thus their quarry, somewhat to his horror, discovered that he was forced to approach the river at a point where it was too deep to wade.

The gaunt cow-puncher was a powerful swimmer. He was desperate and reckless withal. He had expended too much energy in the escapade to hesitate now. Once on the opposite bank, he could laugh at pursuit, and console his shivering person with a soul-warming draft.

As his pursuers thundered down upon him, he grasped the bottle firmly in his hand, poised for an instant on the bank, and then plunged forth into the dark river. There was a tremendous splash as the cold water quickly closed over him.

This was too much for the weary and breathless cow hands. No one cared to follow him into the chill current. They stood disconsolately on the bank, waiting for Slim to reappear on the surface and swim away with his prize.

When Slim reappeared on the surface, he did not swim away. In his upraised hand, the gaunt cow-puncher was holding an object upon which he gazed with bewildered disbelief and sorrow. The spectators on the bank yelled with dismay when they realized the truth. Then they shrieked with glee at Slim's discomfiture. For in his hand, the gaunt one held the neck of a broken bottle. He had dived too low, and the flask had crashed against the rocky bottom. Its precious contents were gone now, speeding downstream with the current of the chuckling river. With infinite disgust, Slim cast the fragments from him and floundered back to the bank.

As he regained dry land and strode among his late pursuers, the cow hands merely gazed upon him silently. With one accord, all turned toward the bunk house. The race was over. They were weary, worn out, bruised, and limping. Slim paused once to pour the water

from his boots. Silently, the cow hands watched the performance.

"Slim," said Red with a feeble grin, "this ain't Saturday night. What's the idea of taking a bath in the middle of the week?"

"Ain't it a balmy night?" retorted Slim bitterly. "Cast your eyes on them pinnacles, men. Ain't they swell and grand? Red says so."

This feeble exchange of courtesies were the only words spoken on the return to the bunk house. They found Sam seated on the veranda steps. The colossal youth was as bland and good-natured as ever. He grinned at them cheerfully as they approached. Slim scowled upon him darkly.

"Why don't you go to bed, big boy?" he demanded gloomily. "I thought you were so all in you couldn't navigate. Listen," he said, as Sam would have replied, "fetch out that liniment. I sure barked my shins climbing out of that blasted cistern."

"I'll use some of it, too," added Red. "I twisted my leg falling into it."

"Somebody tramped on my knee," said another; "I ain't naming no names. If anybody needs liniment, it's me."

"Sorry, boys," said Sam sympathetically, though he was still grinning. "That was the liniment you was chasing all around the premises."

Had Sam made his statement in Greek, the cow hands could not have registered less comprehension. They merely stared at him stonily. Then Slim sat down somewhat weakly and leaned against the veranda post.

"Say that again, Dynamite," he requested, "and say it slower."

"I haven't gone to bed," Sam continued, "because Nevada's drunk, and he's been making too much noise. While I was watching you boys having a good time," he explained, "Nevada sneaked back into the bunk house and took that bottle right off the shelf and drank up all my whisky."

As if in confirmation of his words, came an unmelodious howl from the interior of the bunk house.

"Dynamite," cried Nevada, "there's a regular feller. Good, old Dynamite, listen. There was a buckaroo who found a gallon demijohn under a locust tree——"

"You mean," said Slim, finding words at last, "that the liquor was on the shelf all the while? And it was liniment in the suit case?"

"That's what I told you in the beginning," Sam pointed out, somewhat aggrieved. "You didn't think I would fool you boys, did you?"

Later, when Nevada's hilarity had changed to snores, and Sam's regular breathing showed that that youth was also asleep, Red leaned forth and nudged Slim, whose bunk was near by.

"Listen," he whispered guardedly, "I crave a little information. Bend your mighty intellect on this, Slim. From the beginning of this evening's festivities, was we kidding Dynamite all the while, or was he kidding us?"

"Shut up," answered Slim discourteously. "All I crave is a little sleep."

MORE CORN FOR ALBERTA

IT is expected that southern Alberta will have a greater acreage of corn this year than ever before in the history of the province. Last year the area of southern Alberta planted to corn was fifty thousand acres, and it is expected that this will be doubled this year. In this connection, the Lethbridge Board of Trade plans to hold a corn show in Lethbridge some time in the coming fall.

Bluejay

By Max Brand

Author of "Sandy Sweyn Comes Out of the Wilds," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TWO years in prison was the price that "Blondy" Kitchin paid for illustrating his great strength and the lawless spirit of the open, in the city. A chaplain in prison persuades him to go straight, and he lands in our city, looking for a job on the range.

Randal, an ex-sergeant who nurses a grudge against Kitchin for having beaten him up at one time, owns a ranch outside of Sour City. Since Randal will inherit millions by making the ranch pay, and since he has an outfit that he knows is in cahoots with rustlers, he swallows his resentment and hires Blondy, the strong man, as overseer. Blondy's reward for his work will be eventual possession of the ranch.

While purchasing an outfit, Blondy picks up a little dare-devil boy of fourteen, Pepillo, whom he adopts for a year.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE STEPHEN.

THAT was in the days before every hired man had a flivver; automobiles was something to dream about, but not to see. When I got to the brick hotel back in the white man's part of Sour City, with Pepillo and my luggage in the wagon, there was Randal setting up on the seat of a buckboard, reining in a pair of fine hosses and gentling them down a little with his voice. They were the kind that needed gentling.

You could tell by one look at them hosses why it was that Randal wasn't apt to make any howling success as an economical rancher. That span was a pair of steppers that would of been more useful on a race track than in toting hired men and their blanket rolls to the ranch house, bringing in empty boxes, and bringing out groceries and meat.

I threw in my luggage and climbed into the place beside Randal, which was a pretty hard job, because those horses were all the time starting and backing, half-rearing, prancing, and looking mighty pretty and useless, you can bet your life. When I was finally settled, the kid quickly jumped up into the back of the buckboard as slick as you please.

"What's this?" asked Randal.

"That's my *mozo*," I said.

He give me a quick side glance. "Whole hog, eh?" said he.

"Or none," I replied.

"All right," said Randal, "I wish you luck, but I don't think that you'll ever get by with the boys if you have a servant like this. They ain't the kind that like servants."

"They'll like Pepillo," I said. "They'll like him, or go to the devil. And I don't think that I care much which."

You see, I was happy about that boy. He had a way with him that meant a good deal to me. He was sassy, and he was a crook. Well, so was I. I figgered that I could do a whole lot of good for him, and that he could do a whole lot of good for me. Which is the best way to have any deal arranged —something on both sides, you know! Still, it rather tickled me to think that here was I, a jailbird, aiming to take care of the raising of a kid like Pepillo, that might of bothered a whole train load of father confessors to look after him and his sins.

The road that we followed pitched up a pretty steep grade from Sour City. Pretty soon we come to a height on a place where the road dropped over the top of a hill. There Randal pulled up the hosses and nodded to me. I knew what he meant, so I took a look, figuring that this must be the ranch.

Starting from the outside, I circled my eye around on tall mountains, west and south and east. Where we was, toward the north, there was rolling hills, with a cut through them where Sour Creek rolled through on its way down the bigger valley outside. Inside those mountains and those hills there was as neat a valley as I ever hope to see, all checked about and crossed over with the little streams that run down to the Sour Creek. The sides of them streams was lined with trees. Also, there was groves dotted around casual, here and there, where the cows could lie down for shade in the middle of the day or get shelter in a storm, and where your eye could rest pretty pleasant.

I never seen a range where a gent could ride over with more pleasure than that Sour Creek Valley. Right about in the middle, with the road pointing a straight white finger at it, there was the roof of a house, just about covered up with trees. I didn't have to ask if that was the ranch house.

All I could do was to say: "Is the whole thing one ranch?"

Randal grinned sideways at me, that way that he had, and he nodded. "The fences for the boundaries," said he, "run all around this here valley on the water divides. Uncle Stephen picked out this place at a time when he could of fenced in the entire lower valley as well as this place, but he decided that this was enough for any one man to give his attention to, and work properly. So he settled down here. The old fool! He might have had ten millions in land if he'd spread himself a little more!"

I looked around and I didn't say nothing. I'll tell you that I agreed with old Stephen and not with his nephew. That big, oblong valley was a whopping piece of land. It would make your head ache, if you was to close your eyes of a night and try to think of all the nooks and the corners on it, and all of the landmarks. It just filled a man's eye, and it would certainly fill his hands, too. I didn't wonder that Uncle Stephen had been able to make fifty thousand dollars a year out of that land. I only wondered that he hadn't been able to make two hundred thousand out of it—or even more!

That was before I had a chance to look close at the southern mountains. When I saw them close up, I understood.

Off at a little distance, they looked perfectly natural and nice and harmless, with some white streaks down the sides

of them. When you come closer, you could see that those streaks developed into a regular network across the faces of the mountains, and every cord and crevice of that network was made by the work of the water that was flowing along through limestone formations. That water had been working a few billions of years chewing out the stone and making itself white-walled cañons.

You talk about a labyrinth—that was it! I didn't have a chance to look at it close, of course. But, before we got to the ranch house, I could see there was about a thousand blind alleys among those mountains, and about a thousand alleys that wasn't blind.

Take it by and large, a gent could walk every day of his life in those limestone alleys and try to get the plan of them into his head, but he never would of succeeded. Not a chance! What they needed was a gent with a brain that would understand everything that it seen at a glance and keep it printed solid in his head. You understand?

Randal got sort of nervous as we pulled along toward the ranch. "You don't seem none too cheerful!" he said.

"Well," I replied, "I've heard folks talk about a thieves' paradise, but till I seen those cañons, I didn't know what they meant. Now I understand. Will you tell me, in the first place, just what sort of a gent that Uncle Stephen of yours was?"

"I'll show you pretty soon," said Randal.

We drove along about another mile up the valley and pretty soon he pulled up the hosses and pointed to a fence where the three lines of barbed wire lay hangin' on the ground and rusting away.

"About two days before Uncle Stephen died," said Randal, "he was riding alone this way, and he wanted to see how his shooting eye was. So he outs with his Colt and he blazes away with it in rapid succession three times. When he got done with his shooting, there were the three wires hanging limp on the ground. The boys that were along with him thought so much of that bit of shooting that when Uncle Stephen died, a couple of days later, they swore that that fence should never be repaired, and they keep to their oath. Because of it, I have to let a fifty-acre field lie idle, as you see. But tradition is a great thing on this ranch, and I can't break the traditions. That broken fence stands for the ghost of Uncle Stephen, as you might say, and the boys won't have it fixed. I wanted to show it to you to let you understand the sort of stuff that he was made of!"

It was enough. I looked at those three clipped wires and I understood!

You've heard what I think of revolvers for accuracy. And I don't stand alone. If you doubt me, you meet up with the head of the police department in a big town, and you talk to him. Maybe he's got under him a thousand men that are paid to carry revolvers and to practice with them. They get extra pay and prizes and a lot of glory for being able to shoot straight. They get ammunition furnished to them free for practice, and besides all that, they all know that it's to their own interest to know how to shoot straighter than the crooks. But you ask the chief if he's got three real revolver shots in his thousand men, and if he's an honest chief, he'll lose no time to tell you that he ain't.

When I seen the three clipped wires of that fence, I can't tell you how my arm ached and how my trigger finger went numb to think of all the hours and hours that Stephen Randal must of practiced to be able to shoot like that! It takes a gent that's a hero to have as much patience as that. While he kept up his shooting, he ran a big ranch and chased thieves and kept his accounts, and made fifty thousand dollars a year, clear cash profit!

I didn't need no oil painting of Stephen Randal after that. I seen him just as clear as though I had had his cold eyes looking at me down the barrel of a gun. I seen him just as clear as though I had hit him with all my might and just busted my hand all to pieces on the edge of his jaw.

"All I got to do is to follow the example of a gent like that uncle of yours? All that I got to do is to step right inside of his boots, eh?" I asked Randal.

He nodded. "It's about the only way that you could manage it, I guess. Uncle Stephen was a sort of a hero, around here. They all still talk about him. They take off their hats to him, and they take them off to nothing else in the world."

It looked pretty clear to me; so I said: "Well, Randal, I'll tell you right now that this job is a bad one, and there's about one chance in a hundred that it won't lick me. But I'll try my best. Here's where I start right in studying Uncle Stephen!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FAILURE.

OF course, Randal thought that there was no other idea half so good as that. He said that he himself would have tried to do the imitation of his Uncle Stephen, but there was a couple of things in his way. In the first place, Stephen Randal was a great big man, pretty near as big as me. In the second place, the sergeant was no sort of a hand with horses, and that was pretty near a fatal blow to anybody that would want to step into the real boots of his uncle, who couldn't get himself throwed by anything but an outlaw. He loved bucking hosses so much that he wouldn't have quiet ones on his place!

I could handle hosses—and I was big and strong. Of course, I was no hand with guns, but I had to hope that things would never come to a point where guns would be necessary. If a gent is steady enough and got nerve enough, guns *ain't* necessary. It's the weak fellow, that feels ground slipping beneath him, that has got to shoot.

When we drove up to the house, a colored boy come out and took the heads of the hosses, and another unloaded the baggage. Inside of the house, we could hear a regular old high jinx going on. There was a piano banging somewhere in the offing, and half a dozen of the boys must of been doing a jig in lumbermen's boots. The rest of them was whooping to help things along.

"Moonshine again," said Randal.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Is somebody dead? Is that a wake, maybe?"

He explained that things was usually pretty noisy around the house at night. He said that during the time of his Uncle Stephen, he always let the men come in from the bunk house and use the big library and maybe the back living room, if they wanted to—except when he was giving a party.

When Harry Randal got into control, the men begun to spread. First they got into the habit of walking into the house through the front door. Then they got into the habit of hanging up their hats in the hall; they made the whole first floor of the house sort of into their quarters. What was worse, they began to bring in moonshine whisky, and after the day's work, they would warm up and have a little fun of their own.

"Well, Randal," I said, "why didn't you tell me this a long time ago?"

"I should of," he admitted, "but I was afraid to, old-timer, for fear that you would back down on me. This is a hard nut to crack, and I know it. They're running wilder and wilder every minute of every day, and I've lost all control! They make a fool of every ranch manager that I bring out to the place. I can't fire them. It would simply be turning them into that many

rustlers. Then they asked me to hire some puncher who was able to play the piano. I couldn't find one, and they went and found one themselves. He's a hard-boiled one, too. His name is 'Rusty' McArdle. He's a fellow who had a decent start but couldn't use it. His folks gave him an education, and he can play the piano—very well, as you can hear for yourself. Nature gave him a pair of shoulders just as broad as yours. But he let his education go to pot and he finally had to use his broad shoulders to make a living. He was too lazy to work, and so he became a prize fighter. He would have made himself a near champion, if it hadn't been that he made the town too hot to hold him. So he wound up on the range—and now he's landed here. Rusty McArdle will be your worst problem, 'Blondy!' "

I listened to that riot in the house and thought about what Randal had said to me. The more I thought the nearer I was to turning around and starting on back for the town.

Clearing my throat, I asked Randal how his uncle was in the habit of meeting his men.

"He had a very breezy way," said Randal. "He would walk in and smile at everybody and shake hands all around."

That wasn't very easy for me. I'm no joy bird. Smiling is my hardest job. But I decided that I would try that way of meeting this gang of thugs that called themselves cow-punchers. I was all nerved up to this. As we walked up to the door, Randal laid his hand on the knob.

"Are you ready?" said he, like he was going to introduce me on a stage.

"I'm ready," said I, feeling very shaky. "Let her go!"

Just then that Pepillo give my arm a tug. "Señor," said he, "go straight to your room! Do not stop to talk with them!"

I give him one look, but his face was in the shadow. However, I knew that he must of heard our talk, and he must of got an idea that was working on the insides of him. Then the door opened. It let a blast of light out onto me, and I stepped into the house behind Randal, finding myself in a regular whirl of cigarette smoke.

Around that room was about a dozen or so of the toughest eggs that I ever laid eyes on. They was hand-picked. I'd been in Fulsom, not so long before, where I'd seen a choice lot of thugs and second-timers. Well, Fulsom's was a beauty gallery compared to that lot. They even wore their guns in the house!

I seen a sort of a smear and a blur of faces, but nothing more than general impressions right and left, because everything was pulled to a focus on one man; that was Rusty McArdle.

He had got up from the piano stool, and now he walked to the middle of the room. He was as big as me and made a lot better. Not so much hands and feet, but thicker through the chest and made tapering like a mast, other end up. He had a shock of hair the color of rust, that had give him his name, and he had a pair of blue eyes that was filled to the brim with lightnings.

I never seen a gent like that, so filled with energy. It made you want to smile, just to see him. He could of walked out onto a stage and looked at the audience and just walked off again. They would of clapped for him to come back! That's how much of a man he was.

But I wasn't in the audience. I was up there on the stage with him, and I tell you what, it was an uncertain sort of a feeling. I would of been glad to to be almost any other place rather than there.

"Well, boys," cried Randal, "I've brought out a new man to run the place, and a good one. I hope that you'll all get on with him."

He had started out very brave and cheerful, but his voice wabbled like he was half choked before he got to the end. It was a miserable sort of a situation.

Not one of them devils said nothing; they just looked—except Rusty McArdle. He grinned straight in my face—the sort of a smile that says a lot more than words.

Right then I knew that there was no use staying in that room. I couldn't go around with a smile and shake hands with them all, after the syle of the dead man. The kid had been right when he told me to go straight to my room.

"I'm going upstairs to get washed up," said I to Randal.

He sent a sick look at me, as much as to say: "This is a pretty lame beginning for you!"

Then he led the way out of that big living room. The dimness of the hall outside was like a blessing on my eyes, I can tell you.

Randal didn't say anything till he got me upstairs, where he showed me into a fine, big room with a double bed in it, and curtains at the windows, and a carpet on the floor, and everything extreme civilized. There he began to pace up and down.

"Why didn't you do something?" asked Randal. "Why didn't you strike while the iron was hot? You sneaked away like a beaten cur! Blondy, you've ruined things before you even had a chance to put them right. You might as well start back for town, now. But, if I were you, I'd climb out a window. I wouldn't go back through that room to the front door!"

I wouldn't ordinarily take talk like that from any man, no matter what money he was paying to me, but just then my spirit was a mite broke.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "That's for you."

From downstairs, there come a roar of laughter. I knew that Randal was right; that was for the new manager of the ranch!

Then, from the corner of my eye I seen that Pepillo, nodding toward Randal, and hooking his thumb over his shoulder toward the door. I took that hint.

"Leave me be for a while, Randal," said I. "I want to be alone and think this thing over. You're not helping me any. Things are about as bad as they can be, out here, and you're not helping any!"

He had a lot more to say, and I could see the bad look in his eye that means that a gent has his steam away up high. But it seemed to occur to him that maybe there was still a ghost of a chance that I could turn some sort of a trick for him and for myself. He left everything else unsaid and flung out of the door, slamming it behind him.

I listened to the echo of it crashing from wall to wall, and I was sicker than ever. My courage was about down to zero. As far as that rough gang downstairs was concerned, I could see myself as one of them—but I could never see myself handling those tough fellows, with a bad one like Rusty McArdle at the head of them to tell them what to think.

Pepillo woke me up a little. He shied his hat into a corner of the room and made a face at the door. "That," said he, "is a pig, is it not?"

I couldn't help grinning, in spite of my misery.

He sat down on the table and folded his legs in under him very neat; there he sat with his chin on his two small fists, smiling at me.

CHAPTER IX.

SUPPORT.

JUST to look at him was enough to cheer a man up a good deal. For instance, have you ever seen a blue jay fluttering around through the trees?

You know that the murderer and thief and gossip is going around, hunting for trouble and ready to talk even where there ain't anything to make talk about. Still, there is something so bright about a jay, when the sun hits him, and he looks so sassy and so happy that you can't help smiling.

It was that way with Pepillo. He was a mischief maker, and there wasn't any doubt about that. Yet you couldn't help smiling, in spite of the damage that he might be doing. Right then, I couldn't tell whether he was laughing with me or at me. It didn't make a whole lot of difference.

I should tell you how he had fixed himself up in the store. He had wheedled Gregorio out of a pair of red morocco boots that you could see a mile away, they was so shining. He had a tan-colored linen suit on him, with a sort of an underjacket of a very bright green-blue—a yellow shirt, and a black felt hat with a red feather stuck in one side of it.

He looked like something out of a book—and an old-time book, at that! A queer set of clothes, that was. It sort of took my breath, the first time that I seen them on him. But he had a way about him that just set off those clothes. He was as proud as a peacock, as mischievous as a blue jay, as fierce as a hawk, and as graceful as a swallow. He was like a cross between a singing bird and a falcon. I feasted my eyes on him, and he grinned at me. All the time the lights in his eyes kept changing, as the fires inside of his devilish little head kept burning mean or kind. I didn't know whether he was gunna sympathize with me or mock me or give me good advice.

He said: "This pig—this Randal, he does not count, no-o-o-o?"

He had a way of saying the word like that, letting his voice go half an octave up the scale while he hung onto his question mark.

'Maybe he don't, but that leaves plenty more of the rest that *do* count!"

He only shook his head, Pepillo did. He jumped down from the table and went into the corner of the room. Picking up his hat and flaunting the crimson feather on it, he cocked it on his head. Then he rolled himself a cigarette. It was a treat to watch him, making his little nimble fingers go faster than your eye could follow, and doing it all with one hand, while he looked at you and talked about something else. He was terrible proud of the way that he could roll a cigarette. He lighted his smoke and blew out a puff at the ceiling.

"There is only one!" said Pepillo.

"Only one what?"

"Ha! señor!" he said. "If I am to do your thinking for you, you must follow me closely.

"You darned little blue jay," I said, "how can I listen to what you got to say when I'm so busy watching you?"

"Is it so?" asked Pepillo.

He took a step or two so's he can view himself in the mirror at the other end of that room. There he stood, cocking his head a little to one side and then a little to the other. Then he made a bow and give a smile to the image of himself in the mirror.

"It is true! I am worth looking at. And shall I not have success when I grow up?"

It wasn't hard to guess that what he meant was success with the ladies. Of course, he was right. With that silver voice and that wonderful pair of eyes and handsome face, he would be sure to grow up into a regular heart buster.

"Aye," said I to Pepillo, "if you live out the next two or three years, you'll be leaving me to marry a girl."

"Do not fear, señor," said Pepillo. "For, when I leave you to marry the beautiful American heiress, I shall take you with me!"

"What might I be doing then?"

"You would be my valet, señor."

There was nothing handy but my quirt, and he dodged that. He could almost of dodged a bullet, he was so lightning fast with his feet.

"However," said I, "you ain't gunna live that long, because I'm gunna get so mad at you, some day, that I'll put out a hand——"

"And grasp a nettle, señor," said Blue Jay.

You couldn't put him down. It was like hitting a cork in the water.

"But," continued Pepillo, "this Randal is no help, and he is no hindrance. As for the rest, they might each of them be dangerous, except that there is one of them so much greater than the rest."

"You mean that Rusty McArdle?" I asked. "Yes, and a lot too dangerous for me, I guess!"

"Bah!" yelled Pepillo, stamping his red boot. "Are you not ashamed to confess such a fear to me?"

"You're my conscience, kid," said I. "You're my bad conscience, and I don't mind you seeing the shadier side of me. Yep, I'm afraid of that McArdle."

"So?" said the kid, and he smiled at me. There wasn't any mirth in that smile. It was one of the kind that show all the teeth and make a man look like a cat—plumb mean. They have a way of smiling like that down in Mexico. "You are afraid, then. But why?"

"Why? You had a look at him, didn't you?"

"I had a dozen looks."

I believed it, too. Those dark brown eyes of his was about twelve times as fast as the eyes of anybody else.

"And what did you see?"

"A big man."

"A very big man."

"He does not work," said Pepillo, "so he cannot be as strong as he looks."

"Some need hard work to keep their muscles up," said I, "and some are born strong and stay strong. This Rusty is one of that kind."

Said Pepillo: "You are beaten before you strike a blow!"

"There wouldn't be many blows," said I. "That Rusty wears a gun, and he's got a nervous sort of a hand. He can shoot, fast and straight, and don't you have any doubts about it."

"So can you, señor. Did I not see you pick out a revolver that meant much business?"

"You saw me pick out a bluff," I answered. "If the boys out here ever seen my gun—while I'm cleaning it, say—I want them to see a gat that looks real mean. But it's all a bluff. I can't shoot for sour grapes."

"A bluffer, too!" cried Pepillo. "What kind of a man are you, señor?"

"Enough of a man to turn you upside down and shake the coin out of your pockets!" said I.

I thought that that would make him mad, but it didn't. He just nodded.

"True!" said Pepillo. "Of a hundred, you were the only one to see through me. That is very important, because it is not easy to look through me. Not at all!"

Sure of himself? That's putting it mildly. I never saw such a case of fathead in my life. Yet it wasn't offensive, I don't know why.

"With this Rusty, the fight would be with guns," I finished up.

"You are wrong," said Pepillo. "He would fight in any way that you want. He has never been beaten. And therefore, he would fight with the hands. And you have much hands, señor!"

"His hands may be smaller, but they're just as mucher as mine. You see, you ain't got a move left, youngster!"

He flicked his cigarette into a corner and let it burn its way into the carpet—the little rapscallion!

Then he took out a pair of slim, yellow gloves, saying: "I don't know. I have never yet been beaten in a place where I had plenty of time."

"There's no time here," said I. "Right now, to-night, is when I got to do something!"

"Time?" asked this kid. "Five minutes is a long time! Wait, and you shall see. But I must have quiet, if I'm to think!"

He looked down to the floor and frowned. Up from below come a regular roar of shouting and laughter. The boys down there were taking another pass at the moonshine and livening themselves up for some sort of deviltry that they might have in mind. It give me a shiver because I didn't have to think twice to guess that what they meant was something connected with the new manager on the ranch.

Pepillo started to turn around. While he was doing that, he got another flash of himself in the mirror and paused to enjoy himself, standing like that, just poised on one foot like a dancer, drawing his gloves very slow and easy through his hand.

"Ah, well," said Pepillo, "I shall have to go down and speak to them myself, if you will not!"

"Hey," I cried, "wait a minute, kid. If you go down there, they'll take you apart to see what makes you tick! You don't know those roughs!"

"So?" said this little cocky Blue Jay. "But I tell you, that in the part of the country where I was raised, these rough men would not be rough enough to be more than house *mozos!* No more than that!"

And he flicked the door open and slipped away into the hall outside.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOYS.

THE minute that Pepillo was gone, I was ate up with curiosity to see what he would really do—if he actually dared to go right into the room where those cow-punchers and Rusty McArdle were having their party.

I couldn't very well follow him down the stairs and so look through the open doorway. So I did what Randal had suggested to me a little bit earlier. I heaved myself through the open window and climbed down the side of the house. It was only a story to go down, and there was a drain from the gutter at the eaves of the roof, that ran down the wall beside my window. The grip in my hands was always my strongest point, and so I was able to lower myself to the ground dead easy. I found myself right up against the back windows of the big living room. When I peeked through, I could see the whole layout.

Rusty had a glass of redeye in one hand, and he was making a little speech with the other, as you might say. That speech must have been something about me, by the way that he pointed and looked above him, now and then. By the way that the boys all roared with laughter, I could guess that he was arranging something extra special for me.

However, by the time that I got to an open window, where I could hear everything just as well as I could see it, he had finished his speech. Then the door opened, and somebody said:

"There comes his *mozo!*"

"The little rat looks like he was pretty sure of himself," said another.

He did, too. You think that Pepillo had come down from the king of England to tell the stable boys that they was acting real bad. He made a couple of steps into the room and stood there, giving a flash of those bright eyes of his to every face.

There was a silence, too. I suppose that maybe it was wonder at the nerve of that little kid; maybe it was because they was curious to hear what he would say. He said:

"Amigos, it is not unknown to you that my master is now yours."

They fair blinked when he shot that home at them. Then one of them

roared: "Why they don't make the kind of men that can be master to gents like us. You hear us, kid?"

"You've had your thought for this month, 'Shorty,'" said Rusty McArdle.

This Shorty, that had answered up, was one of the queerest-made men that ever stepped into stirrups. He wasn't more than five feet high, and about three and a half of those feet must have been his body. His legs was hardly long enough to bother about, and they was bowed out to fit the side of a horse. He was near as broad as he was long. When he was sitting down in a chair, his hanging hands just about touched the floor—like an ape, you'd say. Not that he had the monkey look, though, because he looked too mean to be stupid. A real stupid gent never looks like poison. And that was what Shorty would remind you of.

Pepillo just put up his hand to command silence, when they all growled at him. "I don't mind telling you," said he, "that I've had to persuade the señor from coming down here to you. It was a hard task. But I was able to do it, and I have come myself to tell you that it will be wiser for you to keep quiet, here!"

It brought a fair howl from those wild men, and it brought a cold perspiration out on me. It looked as though Pepillo was sort of inspired. He couldn't of said wronger things if he had studied for a year.

I think that one or two of them would of got out and made a rush for the kid, right then and there, but Rusty McArdle waved them back.

"This is sort of amusin'," he said to the kid. "Your boss must be a sort of a duke, or something?"

"That," said Pepillo, as quick as a wink, "is something that you had ought to ask his gun!"

"Oh," said Rusty, "by the way that he come in and went out of the room again, to-night, we all sort of suspected that he might of left his gun behind him!"

It brought another roar from the boys. They liked the way that Rusty phrased things for them. And it certainly *was* pretty neat, you got to admit that.

However, it didn't bother the Blue Jay. He tilted up his head a little, and he slapped his gloves into his other hand, as pert as you please.

"I shall tell you something for your good," said the kid. "The señor has a most frightful temper. Even I am sometimes afraid of him——"

He made a pause there, as though he expected them to laugh. They did; they pretty near busted themselves.

"Leave him be, boys," said Rusty. "I want to hear all the rest of this. I guess that four-flusher upstairs has taught him this spiel by heart before he come down. Go on, little one!"

"Ah, friend," said Blue Jay to Rusty, "I am too kind to repeat to him everything that you have said; I do not wish to see you die!"

That seemed to tickle the boys a lot. Hard as they was, it was easy to see that they looked on Rusty as about the hardest thing this side of chilled steel. I felt the same way about him. All that I wanted was to wring the kid's neck. My second idea was that I had better get ready to hop onto a horse and ride for Sour City as fast as four strong legs and a pair of spurs would take me. However, I waited out this talk, half trembling and half dying out of curiosity to know what that little thick-headed, sassy devil would have the nerve to say to the lions. You never would of guessed.

"I like your sympathy," said Rusty. "I ain't ambitious to fill no early grave. I'd dodged it a couple of times, so far, and somehow, I don't see anything in your boss to make me worry."

Pepillo looked him over and up and down, so long and so steady that finally

it made even Rusty stop grinning and begin to frown.

"What are you looking at, youngster?" he asked.

"I am only wondering," said the Blue Jay, "how the señor will kill you!"

Pretty sassy, that, but Rusty come right back. "With help," said he, "he'll never man it by himself!"

"I do not think it will be with a gun," said the kid.

"I don't think so either," said Rusty.

The gang yelled with their pleasure, again.

"It will be with his hands," said the kid, "because there is enough of you to entertain him for a few moments. However, if you have sense enough to come to your wits now, and if you will ask my pardon, señor, and then beg me to intercede for you with the señor, I may be able to get you off."

"Say, boy," exclaimed Rusty McArdle, "I'm dog-goned if you don't sort of rile me. Now you trot right on back to your boss, and you tell him that this sort of a bluff was pretty good fifty years ago, but that the world has growed up, since, and that the most growed-up part of the world is the gents that is sitting in this room right now, and looking you in the face!"

They all had to rumble their pleasure, at that. Nothing that pleases a man so much as being considered mighty dangerous.

"After all," said Pepillo, "I suppose that it is better to have it over with at once. I shall tell him what I have heard."

He turned around on his heel, as cool as ever. Then Shorty started up out of his chair and come along across the floor with an ugly waddle of a step.

"Wait a minute, grasshopper," said Shorty. "You tell him extra special from me, that he don't need to start in with Rusty McArdle. Rusty is a man-sized man. But me, I'm the kid around this ranch. Still, I'm plenty good enough to make that bluffer take water and like it. You tell him that he'll have to start in with me, or else the boys won't waste no time on him. They'll just roll him in some spare tar that they got handy and then fix him up a coat of feathers. You tell him that!"

"Shall I tell him that—from dirt like you?" asked Pepillo.

While that word simply paralyzed all the nerves in the body of Shorty, and made his huge arms swing sort of helpless at his side, what did the kid do but waltz up and switch Shorty across the face with his gloves, flick-flack, just like that!

It paralyzed me, too, when I seen it. It wasn't with the fingers of the gloves; it was with the buckle ends of them. One of the buckles tore Shorty's lips a little and sent a stream of crimson trickling down toward his chin.

I had a chance to watch all of this, because Shorty was so dumb with rage and astonishment and humiliation that he simply couldn't move. All the while Pepillo was turning around and walking off as easy and as slow as you please. He got to the door while the mad-bull look was still gathering on the face of Shorty.

It exploded, just then. He gave a roar that didn't have any words in it. His eyes had turned red, and his mouth worked in a horrible way to see. Then he lunged after the Blue Jay with both of his long, thick arms stretched out. His hands, they was like the legs of pouncing spiders—hands bigger than mine, even!

That door flicked shut behind Pepillo, but not in any hurry. However, he must have locked it that instant when he was on the other side, because Shorty reached that door and smashed against it. He recoiled without opening it.

"That kid needs a quirting down," cried somebody, "and we'll take his boss along with him. Come on, boys!"

They were willing and ready for that

sort of a game. Pepillo had just roused their bloods. Maybe, ordinarily, they would of had the good sense and the decency to admire the kid for his nerve and his sassy way. I suppose that they'd had a little too much red-eye.

Most of all, there was a lot of them together, and maybe you notice that a mob always makes itself worse or better than any man in it. Either a mob is all angels or all devils. It's easier to be all devils, than it is to be all angels. However, a hundred men is always braver than any one man; and a hundred men is always stupider and more cowardly than any one man.

This night, the punchers on the Randal Ranch was in a bad way. They meant trouble, big trouble, and stacks of it, long continued.

I seen them rush that door and pile up against it, but it was made of strong stuff and they couldn't open it, just yet. I took one more glimpse of their distorted faces. They was just plain black with rage.

Then I turned away; I wanted to get clean of that place and hike for Sour City. I never wanted anything so bad in all my born days. I never was a hero; I never don't pretend to be a hero. A good mix and a free-for-all—sure, that is fun and good fun—but those twelve men meant murder!

However, I thought about the kid in the nick of time. No matter what a mess he had made of things, he, no doubt, had meant right. If those ruffians got hold of him, they would near kill him.

I went up that drainage pipe faster than I ever went any place in my life. I fair ran with my hands. When I come to the window of my room, I looked in, and there was Pepillo with all of the sap run out of him. He was sitting at the table, with his head bowed in his arms, sobbing like a baby!

CHAPTER XI.

HONOR!

IT hit me bad. You wouldn't believe how mighty awful bad it did hit me. I've seen growed-up men, strong and all that, get hurt so bad that they cried. There's nothing much worse than that. Somehow this kid had seemed stronger than any man. There was so much sap in him, so much sassiness and meanness and "go" to him, that I couldn't imagine him breaking down—not if there was a whole battery of guns turned loose and looking him right in the eye.

However, there he was, sitting with his head down, his whole skinny little body shaking with sobs.

It flabbergasted me. I called from the window, "Kid, it's time to go!"

He leaped up from that table as though a bullet had gone through him—a bullet of joy, I should say. All at once he was smiling through the tears. He give two flicks with his hands to his face, and every last one of those tears was gone galley west, and only a sparkle of them left in his long, black lashes.

"I thought you had gone!" gasped out the Blue Jay. "I thought that you had sneaked down—and that you were afraid—and that you had run away from me!"

"I *did* sneak down," said I, "and I did see. I was afraid, and I'm thinkin' of leavin' you here flat and cold, unless you hurry up and come along with me!"

Downstairs, there was the yelling and the yapping of those crazy fighting men. The kid just rested his hands against the edge of that table, saying to me, with a smile:

"I feared that you had gone away from me; I feared that you had run away and thought only of yourself. Oh, señor!"

Yes, sir, you would of thought that I was Santa Claus, to see his blush and his silly grin. Or that I was his best

girl come back to him after a long parting.

"You big rattlebrain," said I, "don't you hear them yelling? They'll be up here in a minute. I've seen and I've heard you, and of all of the fool jobs that I ever seen in the world, you done the most foolish, and the worst in every way. You've pretty near dug a grave for me here in this house. Now you come tearing, or I'll start along without you!"

Darn my eyes, he didn't budge! No, sir, he just stood there, and he smiled at me, perfectly contented and happy.

"Hurry! I got to start, Pepillo!" said I.

He just shook his head. "Ah, no, señor, you will not leave me!"

I didn't know what could be working in his head, the young fool! I started down the pipe, calling: "All right, here I go!"

But I didn't hear him coming with a rush to the window, and so I heaved myself back and looked in. There he was, standing right by the table and smiling at the window, still.

"You see, it will not do. I understand!"

That's what he said to me!

"You understand what, you blockhead? You understand nothing," I cried. "Why, you empty-skulled kid, they'll tear you to bits, if they lay hands on you. You understand?"

"They will not lay hands on me," said Pepillo, as easy as ever.

"Dog-gone me," I yelled at him, "you've gone nutty. You have, for a fact! I want to know what will keep them from getting their hands on you, then?"

"You, señor," said he, very sweet.

It made me so mad, and it bewildered me so that I thought I would choke. I couldn't see. A mist come up before my eyes.

"I'd like to wring your idiot neck myself!"

He only shook his head and smiled still. I was sure that he was crazy, now.

"Pepillo," I begged him, "for Heaven's sake, come along before you get the pair of us killed by staying here!"

He put his head to one side, like a bird on a branch in the summer sunshine. "I cannot go, señor. I have too much pleasure hearing the music of the pack!"

"Crazy or not, they won't spare you. And if you won't come willing, I'll take you by force!"

I heaved myself in through the window, and I made a pass at him. Strike me dead if I didn't nearly get a knife jabbed through the palm of my hand.

There stood Pepillo in the corner of the room with that Mexican, mean smile, showing all of his teeth at me—and there was one of his long, thin-bladed knives in his hand.

"If you touch me, I'll kill you, señor!" he cried. "I have promised you that before, and now I swear it to you on my honor and on the cross that I wear!"

"You treacherous polecat!"

I was staggered and all abroad. I didn't know what to do or where to turn next. I never seen actions that looked more like insanity, and yet Blue Jay was the last person in the world to go crazy. He was more apt to drive other folks mad!

He stood there, changing his smile to a real one.

"It is very pleasant, señor. Feel how the house trembles as they break down the door? They will be here, and at once!"

At that moment, they sent down the lower door with a great smashing and crashing that went echoing through the house. I heard a yell in a room near mine. The voice was Randal's. I was glad, anyway, that he should have some of the misery that I was having. I only wished that he had it all, for bringing

me out to a set of tigers like these crazy men.

However, that didn't get Pepillo any the nearer to the window. I had only the split part of a second, now, to move him. Up the stairs I could hear their feet making thunder. I reached for the drawer of the table, first, and jerked it open to snatch out my gun.

It was gone! The drawer of the table was empty. When I looked up, feeling pretty drawn and desperate, that rat of a boy showed me my Colt.

"If you try a gun, they will surely kill you, señor, and for that reason I took the temptation away from you. You must fight them with your hands, señor!"

That is what the Blue Jay stood up and said to me—as calm as you please, a whole lot calmer than I am, as I write this here down in black and white! I get wind all over again. He sure was calculated to try out the strength of a man's nerves, that Pepillo was!

I said, "Pepillo, you are most likely the death of me, but I'm gunna make one more try to save you from them devils. Will you come?"

"Be warned, señor. I shall not come. Not I! Not a step from this room!"

"Will you tell me why in the devil you *won't* come?" I asked him.

"Ah, well," said Pepillo, "you would not understand."

"Talk out!" I cried.

"It is because your honor is lost if you run away. And you will not run away if I stay here!"

There it was; the cat was out of the bag at last. No, this Blue Jay wasn't crazy; he was worse than crazy. He was what the chaplain had always used to call "romantic." Everything wild that the chaplain didn't like, he used to call romantic. A pretty good word, that—it means—got out of fool story books.

"They aren't really bad," the chaplain used to say to me about the bad criminals; "it's just that the romantic vein has run away with them. They want to imitate the greatness of other criminals before them. All because the writers of idiotic romances have made the idea seem attractive. That's all that there is to it!"

Good old chaplain! He mostly had an idea for everything, but in that spot maybe he was partly right. Certainly when I stood helpless in front of that fool kid, I seen that he was right about what made the wheels go round in Pepillo.

Honor! He didn't want me to run away from that house because I would lose my honor! Maybe was I a knight, or a baron, or something? Had the king give me a trust? Honor! And me that was fresh out of two years in a penitentiary! Honor.

I yelled: "You peanut head! You little yap! Honor? I tell you that I'm just out of the pen! D'you still talk about my honor?"

"Ah, señor," said he, "I trust you completely and utterly! You must stay for the sake of your great soul!"

"My great foot!" I cried, and I made a dive at him.

Well, sir, he heaved himself up stiff and straight and raised the knife in the air. There was such a white devil in his face and such cold steel in his eyes that I couldn't do the trick. All the nerve run out of me, and I stood there panting and cursing him. I was half exhausted. That minute of clashing my will against the will of that mite of a kid made me feel just as though that I had run a mile at full speed.

Then: "They have come for you, my master!" said Blue Jay.

Wham! Crash! They reached the door of that room.

"Come out," they yelled. "We want the man killer. We want the new boss. We want to have a look at him and see what's inside of him! Are you comin' out, boss?"

That was a whole chorus of them, but chiefly there was the bull roar of that Shorty above all the rest of them. When I listened to them I turned away from Pepillo, feeling mighty weak, I can just tell you!

"Señor," said the kid behind me. "Do not let them come in at you! If you do that, you are lost!"

"Why, you little unspeakable fool!" I cried. "There's one man alone out there that's more than a match for me! There's Rusty. He's got everything that I have and something more!"

"It is a great lie!" said Pepillo. "He is not a bulldog, as you are! He is only a tiger—dreadful for one minute—and then very weak! You will see!"

"And the rest of the crowd?"

"They will be nothing! Oh, if I had half of your strength, I would step out and throw them in a heap!"

He would of, too; there was that stuff in him that makes one man the boss over twenty. There wasn't any of that kind of stuff in me, I can tell you!

However, I saw that it was better to die fighting than it was to die standing still. So I sashayed up to the door and turned around, saying to the kid: "Pepillo, you are a thousand kinds of a fool, but you're game, bless you. So long, because I ain't apt to see you again!"

I said that, and he give me a smile and a wave of his hand. What surprised me was that he was white as a sheet, with the eyes just sticking out of his head, exactly as though even Pepillo was scared, too, but didn't want me to see it. However, I didn't have any time to work that all out with my slow-motion mind.

I jerked that door open, and I dived out at the crowd of them that was outside.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

TELEPHONE AT EL TOVAR

ONE of the last of the widely known places in the United States to become accessible by telephone is El Tovar Hotel, on the rim of the Grand Cañon. Telephone connection with the outside world has recently been completed by a two-hundred-and-forty-mile wire to Phœnix, Arizona. The wire connects with the new transcontinental line between Chicago and Los Angeles.

CHANGES IN NEBRASKA FOREST BOUNDARIES

CHANGES in the boundaries of the Nebraska National Forest have recently been announced. These changes are for the purpose of eliminating certain privately owned tracts of land within the forest limits. The areas to be excluded total 1,720 acres. Of this, 640 acres are in Thomas County, and 1,080 acres in Cherry County.

Montana

By James Edward Hungerford

WHERE the Rocky Range is rearing
Down to meet Montana's skies,
Down a twisting trail I'm steering,
Through ol' Nature's paradise;
Where the birds are sweetly singing
Overhead, as they go winging,
To my ears their music bringing,
In the glory o' sunrise!

For some months I've been a-straying
Here and there about the West,
Now I'm *home,* and here I'm staying
In the place that I love best;
Where the silver streams are flowing,
And the mountain peaks are glowing,
And wherever I am going,
With contentment I am blest!

Back again in ol' Montana,
Dressed in duds I like to wear,
'Round my neck a gay bandanna,
In my heart no trace o' care!
Little bronc hoss just a-skipping,
Needing neither spurs nor whipping,
Down the home-bound trail a-zipping—
Ol' Montana, we are *there!*

As the birdies chirp their trillings,
As they flit from tree to tree,
I can picture Butte and Billings,
And they sure look *good* to me!
Far away, when I was roaming,
They would loom up in the gloaming,
And my heart went swiftly homing
Back to where I longed to be!

Now I'm here, no more to wander—
Nevermore again to stray,
And of it I am some fonder
Than before I went away!
And believe me, I'm not "spieling,"
When I say there comes a-stealing
In my heart that certain feeling
That I'm *home*—and home to stay!

When He Didn't Have A Chance

By Edward T. Glynn

Author of "A Fool and His Matches," etc.

WITH a grimace of pain old "Pop" Saunders carefully shifted his position on the cabin bunk and swept the bearded, leering visage of his younger partner, Jake Slavens, with a look that held more of scorn than it did of any seeming fear.

"So that's it, eh?—that's the little game you've had in mind? Cleanin' out—cleanin' out cold an' leavin' me flat?" he said, half accusingly, half contemptuously, his close-squinted eyes unflinching under the lash of Slavens' venomous gaze. "Pretty low-down trick, ain't it, pard, 'specially on a man with a broken leg? Stealin' his grub an' takin' his gold; cleanin' out——"

A snarled oath escaped the other's lips. He stepped a bit closer to the grizzled old-timer on the bunk and swept one hand toward the bulging pocket of his coat. Suddenly his snarl gave way to an evil, gloating smile, and he tauntingly flourished the muzzle of an automatic pistol in the prostrate patriarch's face.

"Yeah, cleanin' out is correct, yuh danged ol' limpin' lizard," he replied. "Cleanin' out now an' cleanin' out right. Gold, grub, an' all, they goes with me. Only thing I'm leavin' yuh here is that danged ol' busted leg an'—well, I reckon that won't get yuh far—not much—no matter how good yuh can hop!"

He paused a moment, grinning again at his own crude jest; then, with another little flourish of the gun, went on: "Yeah, I'm cleanin' out, ol'-timer—leavin' yuh flat right where yuh lay; but don't yuh think for a moment I'm doin' this all offhand. Fact is I've been plannin' this little play o' mine for quite some time—five-six weeks; ever since we hit that sweet little pocket back there up the gulch.

"What I first aimed to do was plug yuh cold an' suddenlike some night when yuh was a-snorin' there in yuhr bunk; some night when I was certain

we'd cleaned up all the dust there is aroun' this dog-gone gulch. That would o' been pretty quick now, too—maybe in another week; but this here busted leg o' yourn, that accident yuh had to-day, spikes my purty little plans an' calls for another deal."

Again he briefly paused, baring his wolflike fangs in another evil grin; then he went on: "Howsomever, this here play I'm pullin' off now, it sure beats that first little scheme o' mine plumb hollow. Couldn't be sweeter, safer, no way at all. Can't nobody pin nothin' on me for this, not once I'm on my way, an'—well, it sure is a laugh I'll never forget!

"All I gotter do now is pull my freight an' leave yuh cast the way yuh are—no grub, no fire, no matches. An' all they'll ever find up here—case anybody ever finds anything at all—is just a poor ol' coot with a busted leg what up an' died o' the cold! Other way, somebody might o' smelt a rat if I'd went an' put a bullet in yuhr hide.

"Yuh know what them mounties are, an' danged if I wants any truck with 'em once I'm startin' out!"

The grin gone from his lips, Slavens stood for a moment, jaw shoved out, eyes boring malevolently into old Pop Saunders' upturned face. It was the latter who broke the momentary silence. As he spoke he eased himself a little higher in the low-hung bunk and held the other's gaze with a challenging stare of his own.

"Well, if that's the play, Jake—if that's the kind of a skunk yuh are—go to it," he said evenly enough. "Only yuh'd better be dog-gone sure yuh're gonta get away—out o' these hills—afore yuh start. 'Member yuh didn't know any of the trails comin' in. I had t' break 'em all the way. An' yuh've always said——"

Slavens interrupted with a nasty little laugh. "Don't yuh worry none about that; don't yuh worry none about me at all. That was only a lot o' bunk I was feedin' yuh, comin' in—that stuff about me not knowin' the trails. Maybe I ain't no snow-buckin' ol' pelican like yuhrself, but yuh can bet I ain't aimin' none to lose my way once I'm linin' it down to Dawson with my pockets full o' dust!

"'Sides, on this here trip I'm takin' plenty o' time an' plenty o' grub, an' so it ain't gonta matter none—not much—even if I do get twisted up for a day or two, makin' it out. Seein' as yuh can't follow my tracks—not far, anyhow—an' seein' as Goldpan, that nearest camp, is only six-seven days off. Don't yuh waste yuhr worries none on me, ol'-timer; just yuh save 'em for yuhrself!"

Giving vent to another little, mirthless chuckle, Slavens lowered the gun, shoved it back in the pocket of his coat, and deliberately turned away. He had taken but two or three steps toward a rough-hewn table on which was piled a big array of foodstuffs—all there was in the cabin—when a sudden movement on the bunk caused him to pause and glance around. A look of mingled surprise and alarm crossed his face at sight of old Pop Saunders seated on the edge of the bunk, the muzzle of a long, blue .45 trained squarely on his heart.

Slavens instinctively darted one hand toward his side, then stood motionless as old Pop, springing erect, snapped out a curt command.

"No, don't yuh do it—yuh sneakin', double-crossin' polecat; don't yuh reach for nothin' but the roof! Just stick 'em up high an' stick 'em up quick. I sure don't hanker none t' pollute the air o' this here cabin by salivatin' no skunk like you, but——"

Slowly Slavens' hands went groping high above his head. A faint smile of approval spread across the patriarch's lips. Shoving the muzzle of the .45 hard against the other's chest, Pop deftly frisked the weapon from his

traitorous partner's pocket, and tossed it on the floor underneath a bunk. He then backed the latter into a corner of the room, far from the reach of a loaded rifle toward which the cowering rogue had shot one hasty, covetous glance.

His smile changing back to a sneer that made the other cringe the more, the ancient then deigned speech again.

"Kind o' fooled yuh, didn't I, eh? Thought I was all bunged up with a busted leg an' couldn't call yuhr crooked little play no way at all. Well, yuh got left, didn't yuh—left a-plenty? Leg ain't busted no more than yours, an' that little fall I took a while ago—that little cropper off the cliff out there—it was all a fake!

"Now then, yuh polecat, just yuh listen for a moment, an' I'll tell yuh how it is—how come I've spiked this onery little play o' yuhrs, right where it starts. 'Pears like I've seen that face o' yourn some place else; just where I couldn't noways tell, not till the other day. Then it comes to me sudden yuh're that grub-stealin' polecat—'Shifty Jake'—what was run out o' Forty Mile Creek two-three years ago. Wasn't quite sure o' myself, howsomeever—didn't want t' call yuh wrong on a turn like that. Consequently I went an' cooked up this little trick o' mine to-day just t' feel yuh out.

"Just kind o' figgered yuh'd naturally up an' show yuhr own true colors if once yuh thought yuh had me foul, an'—well, yuh certainly did! I ain't had to guess no more, not about you, not from the moment I came draggin' myself in here an' hour ago like I had a busted leg—an' all yuh gave me was the laugh!"

As old Pop finished, eyes boring their contempt deep into the other's face, Slavens went livid in a murderous rage born of his suddenly baffled plans. In a corner of the dimly lighted cabin he stood for a space, covertly calculating the distance between himself and the tall, gaunt old-timer standing but a few short steps away. Inwardly convinced that in a physical combat he could quickly master the other, Slavens was prompted for a moment to risk a sudden spring—chance the single shot old Pop might get in before he could crush the ancient to earth under the weight of his own huge bulk. One swift blow of his powerful fist, one mighty smash to the ancient's jaw—but something in the cold, hard menace of the latter's all-seeing eyes held him back. Resigning himself, he forced an air of bravado and stalled for time.

"Well, seein' as yuh've got me cornered, seein' as there ain't no sense in me allowin' as maybe I was only playin' a little joke myself—just the same as you," he said, sneering, "what yuh gonner do about it?"

Old Pop seemed to consider this question for a long, full moment, his lips tightening into a hard, thin line as he did. When finally he spoke, there was an added loathing for the other in his slow-drawled words. "What I'd ought to do is plug yuh right where yuh stand—just like the polecat yuh are. That's what most gents in the North they'd be givin' yuh right this minute—a bullet through yuhr black, crooked heart!

"Maybe I'm a fool t' let yuh go, give yuh a chance t' get away," he continued slowly, "but I reckon that's what I'll have to do. Can't shoot yuh down in cold blood—that ain't my style at all. But after this yuh can't expect none to stick around here an' be my pard, no more.

"Slavens, I'm agonta turn yuh loose, pack yuh off with a poke o' gold and a one-week's dole o' grub. The gold is your own share o' what we found in that pocket up the gulch. Yuh don't deserve a speck of it—not after what yuh did to-day; but me, I made a bargain, an' I'll stick by that bargain

now. The grub, it'll get yuh down to Goldpan, but yuh'll have to go fast an' stick t' yuhr trail. Yuh can buy more grub when yuh hits that camp, grub that'll last yuh down to Dawson.

"Once in Dawson, get that first boat out this spring, 'cause yuh'll never get a chance to catch another! Yuh can take that tip from me just afore yuh start, an' don't forget I'll be campin' on yuhr trail, maybe, just a week behind. Once I've spread around the news as how you're still in the North an' up to tricks, yuh'll be a-findin' this here Yukon a danged sight more unhealthy than it even is right now!"

Still fuming inwardly at the way things had turned against him, Slavens made as if to speak as Pop concluded; then he caught himself and smiled into the depths of his beard. In silence he obeyed a gruff command that fell from the other's lips and slumped into a chair in the center of the room. Seated there, he sullenly watched old Pop dole out his promised allotment of grub—a week's scant supply of bacon, coffee, and flour. Along with these Pop shoved aside on the table a well-filled poke of gold and a fistful of all-precious matches. Stepping back, the patriarch then mutely signed the other to prepare his pack, pocket his gold, and go.

Under the watchful eye of Pop the rascal quickly made ready for the trail, shouldered his pack, and shuffled toward the door. Pausing there to strap on his snowshoes, he spoke for the first time since Pop had called his crooked hand with a gun that still dominated every move he made.

"Ain't yuh gonner give me back my gat?" he ventured meekly enough, casting a longing glance toward the weapon dully glinting on the floor underneath the bunk where Pop had tossed it. "There's plenty o' wolves 'tween here an' Goldpan."

Old Pop Saunders shook his head. "Nope, Slavens, yuh don't get that. Reckon I'll have t' keep the gun myself, just so's yuh won't come sneakin' back t' plug me in the dark! Reckon yuh don't need worry none about them wolves, though, goin' down, 'cause yuh're one o' the breed yuhrself! Better make it fast an' snappy, once yuh steps outta here. Line it straight for where yuh're goin' an' try no tricks along the way. That grub won't last yuh longer than a week—just get yuh down to Goldpan, an' don't yuh be in sight down there, once I hits that camp myself.

"Slavens, I'm givin' yuh a chance yuh don't deserve, but yuh're payin' for it high an' handsome," he continued, a queer little smile appearing on his lips. "Right next that pocket we hit up the gulch is a vein that's rotten rich; one yuh might o' shared with me—same as the pocket—if yuh hadn't been the skunk yuh are. I just was keepin' mum about that hidden lode until I'd felt yuh out."

The old-timer's grin widened a bit at something in the chagrined look that swiftly crossed the other's face; then, with a last little flourish of the gun, he voiced a final word.

"Now then, you polecat—mush!" he cried. "Hit yuhr trail an' don't come back. Yuh're lucky I'm lettin' yuh go at all, but yuhr luck won't last if I see yuh again. Just don't forget that first boat out o' Dawson."

Slavens mumbled an oath beneath his breath, shifted the pack into balance on his shoulders, and in silence went mushing down the gulch.

That night Slavens came slogging wearily up from the wind-swept bed of a frozen creek and turned his steps toward a dilapidated old cabin he remembered having passed on the way going in with old Pop Saunders—a chance acquaintance—five short months before. Recollections of that cabin had

fitted in well with certain plans born of his evil mind during those long, tedious hours he had spent on the trail since Pop had turned him out, a veritable exile of the snows.

Once inside the shack, Slavens dumped his pack on the floor, surveyed the premises with a grin of seeming satisfaction, and immediately proceeded to the task of building a fire in a rusty old stove that stood in the center of the cabin floor. Half an hour later he had cooked himself a generous meal from his scant supply of grub and wolfed it down with two big cups of steaming black coffee. Smug and secure from the bitter cold of the outer Yukon night, he presently drew a rough-hewn chair close beside the cabin stove, produced his pipe, and resigned himself to further contemplations of the scheme he had in mind. After the manner of his ilk he shortly fell to voicing his thoughts aloud.

"Figgers I'm shaggin' it down to Dawson, does he? Figgers I'm beatin' it out the Yukon an' don't darst tarry on the way, huh? Well, maybe he's got my number, an' maybe I'm a lucky dog he didn't go call that play o' mine with a hunk o' lead. He sure up an' booted something himself when he went an' sprung that mouthful about the hidden vein what's so rotten rich back there in that gulch!

"Figgers I don't deserve none of it, eh? Figgers I'm lucky to get what I did—this here one little, stingy poke o' gold! Well, maybe he's got another think comin', an' you can bet I knows what it is! Reckon I'll just lay low in here for two-three days—just give him a chance to think I'm gone—then slip back an' settle that coot for keeps. Reckon he'll be a-figgerin' I'm halfways down to Goldpan, an' that's one little mistake he'll never know he made!"

He snickered aloud at something in his thoughts, then fell back into silent meditations. He chuckled again as he perceived the ease in which his evil ends could be obtained. Mulling things over, he saw no chance of error, no risk to himself; nothing but a ridiculously simple way in which to retrieve all he had lost by that recent debacle back in old Pop Saunders' snow-bound cabin.

"There ain't nobody knows I ever came in with the ol' coot, anyhow," he assured himself as he clinched things home, "an' so there ain't nobody apt to ask no questions, if they see me workin' them diggin's alone. Soon's I've got rid of the danged ol' fool I'll beat it down to Goldpan, get me plenty o' grub, then come back an' clean out that vein quick as I can. An' once I've got enough——"

Long before he curled up in his blankets that night, Slavens had perfected to the last detail his plan of procedure in the crime he had in mind. Yes, it would be easy enough—a mere matter of retracing his steps to the snow-bound gulch, slipping into the cabin while Pop was asleep, and bashing the ancient over the head with a good, stout club, one he could readily fashion while hibernating here in his present retreat. The door of the ancient's cabin was never locked—Slavens smiled at the trusting folly of those who dwelt in the North; the ancient himself was a sound, heavy sleeper; there were no dogs.

His plans all laid and his conscience in no way disturbed by any thoughts of the grisly thing he had in mind, Slavens spent the next two days idling about the shack in comparative comfort and ease.

With plenty of more grub in early prospect—old Pop Saunders' entire larder—he ate generously of his own, consuming practically his whole week's supply in half a dozen meals. With the same reckless abandon he wasted his matches—most precious of all things in the North—using one after the other to light his ever-busy pipe as he sat in

front of the cabin stove puffing up all-alluring visions of the soft, easy life ahead.

The morning of the third day he stepped to the cabin door and smiled in smug satisfaction at the clear blue sky. Less than half an hour later, having wolfed down a hasty breakfast—leaving him only a taste of grub for the trail ahead—he was mushing back the way he had come. Concealed in the folds of his blankets was a long, heavy club, a weapon crudely shaped from a log he had torn from the floor of his recent refuge.

Plodding on at a leisurely gait, Slavens grinned to himself as he mentally pictured the scene that lay ahead, pondered how long old Pop would live once he had brought that wicked-looking weapon down on the sleeping patriarch's skull. He chuckled openly at a grim vision of his final vengeance, cursed into his beard at the meager chance of a slip-up in his heinous plans. His face hardened as he shook off this momentary fear, and he grinned again.

"Nope, there ain't no chance of a slip-up—no chance at all," he assured himself as he slogged along. "He'll be there, all right, fast asleep, and he'll never wake up! Ain't no chance anybody has come along since I left, an' it's certain sure he ain't pulled freight himself.

"Case he had, there'd sure be signs o' him about—this here is the only way he could o' come, an' there ain't no signs in sight. Nope, everything sure looks hunky-dory, an' I'm playin' my hand just right. Bet that ol' coot is a-thinkin' right now I'm halfways down to Goldpan."

It was well past the noon hour when Slavens finally came to a halt in a little, timbered gully, gathered wood for a fire, and boiled himself a pan of coffee. For the last hour or so heavy, gray clouds, scudding down from the north, had partly obscured the clear blue sky of the earlier day, filling him with sudden, growing megrims. Coupled with a swift-dropping mercury, they portended the coming of a storm. Slavens had no particular desire to be caught unprepared in a blizzard on the open trail. Only too well did he know the perils of a Yukon gale; two frozen toes had once taught him a lesson he would never forget.

Having warmed up his chilled body with two big mugs of the strong, black coffee, his view of things brightened up again, and he fell to counting the storm as an aid to his own nefarious ends.

"Well, a good two-three-day blizzard will plumb suit me—provided it don't bust until I'm safe in that ol' codger's cabin. Ain't much chance that anybody will be showin' up aroun' in here to spoil my little party, storm or no storm. All the same I'll feel the coast is a danged sight clearer, case these tracks o' mine are covered up under four-five feet of snow, once I'm off the trail myself.

"Looks like I've got to hustle some, though, or the tricks may be against me. Yes, sir, I reckon I'd better get busy an' beat ol' Mister Blizzard to it!"

Without further delay he gathered up his kit, shot one last look into the clouding sky, and hurried on his way. Mushing on in a race against time, he inwardly exulted as the storm held off and mile by mile he drew nearer to his isolated goal, far back in the snow-clad hills.

The mercury had dropped to thirty below, and a wind that chilled him to the marrow was screeching down across the white, barren wastes. Just as he reached the far upper end of old Pop Saunders' gulch, the blizzard burst upon him in all its pent-up fury.

Though it now was dark as pitch, so dark that he scarce could see a hand before his face, it was still too early for old Pop Saunders to be asleep, especially on a night like this. Slavens,

groping a slow and cautious way down the storm-lashed gulch, turned his steps toward a hiding place he wisely enough had chosen in advance.

This was a ten-foot tunnel that Pop and he had burrowed into one side of the gulch shortly after coming to the place, a tunnel long since abandoned. It now promised Slavens a ready refuge from the storm, wherein he could thaw out his freezing bones, laugh at the cheated elements, and bide his time until he felt it safe to strike.

Poking on for a few yards more in the blinding arctic gale, he came to the tunnel's mouth, groped his way inside, and breathed in frank relief as he loosened the pack on his back and eased it to earth.

He fumbled into his pocket for a match, drew it forth with numb, stiffened fingers, and struck it against the tunnel wall. A triumphant smile appeared on his lips as the flickering light revealed rubbish enough on the tunnel floor to start the thing he needed most—a fire. Ten minutes later he had kindled a cheerful blaze just within the tunnel's mouth and was squatted there, back against the tunnel wall, gulping down the last of his all-precious grub, two half-frozen sour-dough biscuits and a final pan of coffee.

His frugal meal finished, and the ravenous appetite created of his long, hard day on the trail thus partially appeased, he stepped to the entrance of his cavelike refuge and peered out into the gale-swept night. With a shudder he dismissed from his mind a vision born of the rising blizzard—a vision that brought to his lips a bitter curse. He thought of old Pop Saunders, snug and cozy down there in that little cabin near the foot of the gulch, a cabin now screened from his view by the smothering curtain of snow.

Dodging back into the warmth of the fire-lit tunnel, he mouthed another oath, shook his fist in the general direction of the ancient's cabin, and voiced his thoughts aloud:

"Well, I s'pose I've gotta hole up here—play it safe—till ol' gee-whiskers gets to sleep. Can't see the dog-gone shack from here, so can't tell when he douses the light. Guess it's gonta be four-five hours, though—maybe midnight. Once I'm sure he's tumbled in, he sure won't get no chance to tumble out!"

An evil smile returning to his thick, bearded lips, he made himself as comfortable as possible on the floor of the tunnel, pulled up his blankets, and resigned himself to inner thoughts.

Several hours later—shortly after midnight—Slavens started up from a doze into which he had unintentionally dropped. The fire was out, and the eerie darkness of the tunnel seemed all the more fearsome in the roar of the storm outside. It was colder than ever—fatally cold—with the mercury close to fifty below. It was the cold and a gnawing sense of hunger that had wakened Slavens from his doze, starting him up with a shudder and a curse at the risk he had taken in dozing off at all.

He stood up and stamped about for a minute or so, stirring up the sluggish circulation in his half-frozen body; then, dropping to his knees again, he groped carefully around on the tunnel floor until his fingers closed on something that brought to his chattering lips a smile that well enough was hidden in the all-engulfing gloom.

Without pausing even to gather up his blankets—visions of the warm, snug cabin just ahead caused him to chuckle aloud—he strode toward the mouth of the tunnel, halted there for just a moment to peer outside, then stepped forth into the vortex of the storm, gripping a little firmer the wicked-looking cudgel swinging in one of his hands.

Ten feet from the tunnel entrance he was forced to crawl behind a sheltering

rock, turn his back to the lash of the gale, and get his bearings anew. With a muttered oath and a face that now held no smile of any kind, he presently resumed his precarious way, hugging close to the guiding wall of the gulch as he went.

"Sure gonta be a humdinger—no doubt about that," he mumbled to himself as he fought his way along. "Reckon she'll last two-three days, maybe a week. Well, long she does, better I'll like it. Plenty o' grub, lots o' time. Guess that ol' fossil is sure dead to the world by now; must be after midnight; but if the light's burnin' in his cabin——"

He broke off short, shook his head, and winced at a sudden fear. If the light was lit, if old Pop Saunders was awake—well, he'd have to go through with his game just the same!

With a shudder he promptly perceived the futility of retreating to the tunnel and biding time a little longer. Without any fire, with only a single match left of the fistful he had so wantonly wasted since Pop had turned him adrift, three short days ago, he couldn't go back. It would be little less than suicide, folly of the rankest kind. Another hour in a storm like this, and he would surely freeze to death. He was half perished now, numb, stiff, half blinded by the hard-driven snow; he cursed at every step he took.

Gripping the cudgel in his hand a little tighter, Slavens squared his jaw and uttered a curse that was lost in the fiendish howling of the storm.

"If the danged fool is awake, if there ain't no other way—well, I'll bust right in an' bash him where he stands!" he muttered. "Reckon I can do it; take 'im plumb by surprise. He won't be lookin' for no callers to-night, an'—but I've got to find that cabin first! Cripes, if I should miss it in the dark!"

Though the distance from the mouth of the old, abandoned tunnel to the storm-hidden cabin was scarcely a hundred yards, it took Slavens all of half an hour to make it at the pace he was forced to pursue. Swift-growing fears were causing panic in his mind when, quite by chance, a rift in the smothering curtain of snow revealed to his straining eyes the black outline of the ancient's shack, less than a dozen steps away.

Suppressing a cry of joy, Slavens quickly shifted his course and plunged, waist-deep, through a new-formed drift, fearful less the fickle fates would blot the goal from his sight again before he could get his bearings aright.

Two minutes later he had reached the side of the cabin. The place was in utter darkness, silent as the tomb it so resembled there in its ghostly sheen of white. Plainly old Pop Saunders was sound asleep; plainly the fates were playing their cards straight into Slavens' crooked, crimson hands; one more minute, a cautious step inside——

Slavens chuckled openly as a mighty blast came sweeping down the gulch, crashed against the cabin wall, and then raced off, raising a din that reminded one of a thousand devils laughing in their fiendish glee. Under the cover of a din like that, old Pop Saunders would never know what happened!

Groping his way slowly ahead, Slavens circled the corner of the cabin and fumbled in the gloom for the latch of the door. In the utter darkness of the night, he scarce could see a foot away. An evil grin showed for a moment between the folds of his beard, as he shifted his grip on the club in his hand—and then the grin abruptly vanished.

The club dropped from his nerveless fingers, and a startled cry—one of mingled horror and surprise—escaped his lips.

The door was wide open, blown far back against the cabin wall; beyond the threshold was a foot of snow, piled up in a drift on the cabin floor! Obvi-

ously the place was empty, deserted; the fire out, the cupboard——

"Cripes, he's gone—or dead!" screamed Slavens, terror-stricken, and leaped inside. "Saunders—Pop!" he cried.

In a swiftly rising panic, he delved into a pocket of his coat, produced a match—the last he owned—and struck it into life. His jaw dropped and his heart went sick at the sight revealed by the flickering glow; one glance around the room, and he knew instantly the very worst of his fears were true.

The fire was out, the larder bare, the bunks empty—the cabin stripped to the four cold walls!

Stricken speechless by the horror of his plight, Slavens stood for a moment, staring blankly into space. Suddenly his gaze fell upon a sheet of paper pinned to the rough-hewn table within his easy reach. In the dying glow of his last precious match he snatched the paper up and scanned its contents with a look that bared the depths of his black despair. The note ran:

SLAVENS: Kinder figgered you might come sneakin' back and try to get me foul; consequently I've up and decided to pull out myself. I'm headin' up the back trail into the hills—up to Poker City—so you'd better not follow. There's an old tillicum of mine up there what I aim to pick as a pard when I open up that hidden vein of mine this spring—that vein what you might of shared yourself if you hadn't been the polecat you certainly are.

Gold, grub, and all—they've gone with me. Only thing I've left around here is another little tip to you. If it ain't too late you'd better take it—an' I guess you can savvy what it is! POP SAUNDERS.

The match in Slavens' hand gave a last little sputter, then died out in the breath of an icy blast that swept in through the open door. Dumbly Slavens let the note flutter from his stiff, cold fingers to the snow-covered floor.

Another moment he stood there, like one frozen to the spot; then, gurgling a cry that was half a curse, half a sob, he wheeled around, bolted for the door, and plunged outside.

He knew he didn't have a chance, that his game was up—lost; but even a rat hates to die in a trap!

INDIAN FOUND UNDER ROCK

BURIED under half a ton of rock, the dead body of an Indian was found recently a mile north of Andrale, Arizona, on the banks of the Colorado River, just above the water mark. The discovery was made by Charles Beams of Andrale, who had been hunting for John Cooper of the Yuma Indian Reservation in California, who has been missing for some weeks.

DEER HAVE STRANGE MALADY

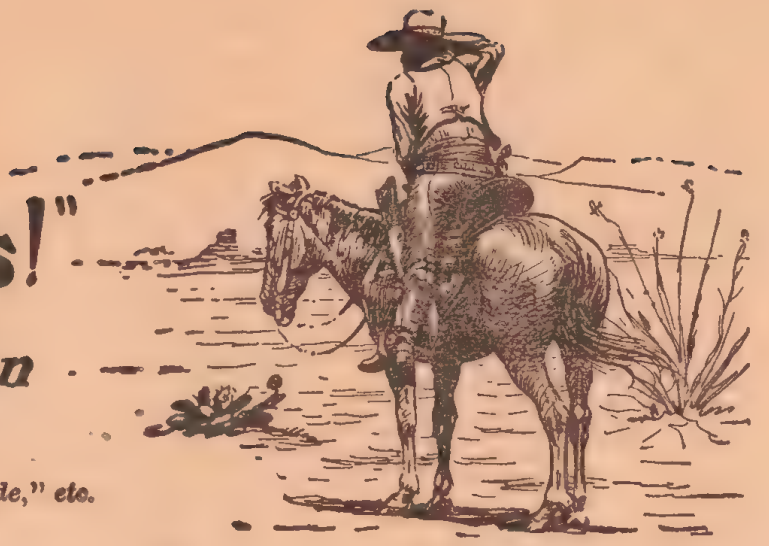
MANY mule-tail deer have been reported dying in the mountainous regions near Redding and MacArthur, California, from some malady which has not as yet been diagnosed. The State Department of Agriculture is conducting an investigation into the nature of the ailment, as its officials are concerned lest it gain further headway.

"Get Jimps!"

By

Arthur Preston Hankins

Author of "The Lucky Bug Lode," etc.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE OBSTACLE.

THE sheriff of Caldera County and his fellow prisoner were making as much time as possible as they worked their way in the direction of the barking dog. There was but a single thought in the mind of each: The dog had discovered some wild animal in the cave and was holding it at bay. A wild animal meant food.

"Little devil!" muttered Limpy, as he followed in the footsteps of Highfall, who was carrying the electric torch. "It was a good piece o' work, Link, when you picked up that tramp. Whatever he's got is a fightin' animal, or he'd charge in and kill it, instead of merely declarin' himself. But even coyote meat would make good grub now."

The yelping became clearer and clearer as they hurried on. Finally Lincoln said over his shoulder:

"We're traversing passages that we've never found before, Limpy. I'm beginning to wonder if The Count hasn't discovered the western entrance. In that case——"

"Don't be an undertaker, Link," pleaded the sheriff. "We don't want any western entrance, for it'll be guarded, and the findin' of it won't change the situation much. What we need is food. That dog has found something. Let's think that way as long as we can, anyway."

Shortly after this a sharp cry from Highfall brought Limpy to a stop.

"What now?" he asked.

"Knocked the stuffing out of my head," the scientist complained. "The roof suddenly became lower, and, as I was flashing the light on the floor, I didn't notice it. Look; look ahead, Limpy!"

The sheriff found himself gazing down a tunnellike passage that narrowed with every foot.

"That looks like a blind alley to me," he observed. "She'll run to nothin' around that turn there, if she keeps on dwindlin'."

"But the dog's down there. Hear him?"

"We can't go where that bunch of skin and bones can," drawled Limpy Jimps, "but we can try."

In a stooping position they forged ahead. The passage twisted to the right and to the left continually; presently the two were crawling on hands and knees.

"A little of this goes a long ways with me," said Jimps, puffing. "How far ahead is that confounded dog, anyway?"

"We're getting pretty close to him," warned Highfall. "Better get your gun ready. The thing, whatever it is, may dart out past us suddenly when it sees us."

"Listen a moment!" said Limpy.

They paused and, on hands and knees, remained in silence, listening to the dog's frantic yelping.

"What's that?" asked Highfall.

The sheriff muttered: "It sounded like a human voice—a—woman's voice."

"It's that, or I'm crazy," replied Highfall. "Let's creep on silently, Limpy. There's something strange about all this."

Their knees making no sound on the bare rocks beneath them, the two went slowly ahead, Highfall awkwardly playing the light before them. They made a turn, and the sheriff bumped into his companion, who had ceased his movements suddenly. Over Lincoln's shoulder he looked ahead.

The passage dwindled fast before them, like an elongated, cone-shaped chute. At the end of it they saw the dog, his tail toward them and wagging furiously. He was dancing from side to side, his head down and close to what appeared to be the end of the passage.

"Listen!" whispered Highfall.

Then came a tinkling voice from beyond the dog's position: "Why, you poor thing, you! How on earth did you get in there?"

Limpy Jimps sat down hard on the stone floor. Highfall flopped over on his side. They stared with round eyes at each other. Then in the same breath they spoke a single name:

"Janice!"

After this there followed a long silence, save for the continued yelping of the yellow cur. He looked back, the light having attracted him, and wagged his lean tail at his friends, but his thoughts were only temporarily deflected from the crevice to which his nose was pressed.

"Link," whispered Limpy Jimps at last, "if I begin to get violent, be kind to me, will you? Just try to reason with me—don't club me over the head."

"I'm as crazy as you are, Limpy," Highfall said.

"We been drinkin' too much rich water," the sheriff gravely observed.

"You said 'Janice,' didn't you?"

"Didn't you?"

"I did."

"I did, too."

"But——"

"But nothing! Let's find out whether we're off our trolleys or not. If I'm loco, Link, by golly, I want to know about it."

They crawled forward again, one behind the other. They found, when they drew near to The Count of Monte Cristo, that he was barking through the space between a large roundish boulder and the rock wall on the left. The boulder comprised the end of the passageway. There was no doubt but that the narrow tunnel continued on the other side of this huge rock, but there was no passing beyond it. It filled the tunnel completely, making an impassable obstruction for any animal larger than a ground squirrel.

Limpy Jimps shouted: "Who's there? Is somebody on the other side o' this rock?"

There came an unmistakable gasp from beyond the obstruction. "Limpy Jimps! Is that you?"

"Janice!"

"It's I! What—— Oh, Limpy, have I found you—really? I—I can't quite understand! Where are you, anyway?"

"And while we're on the subject of who is here and who isn't," said High-

fall suddenly, "I'd like to answer 'Present,' myself, if there's no objection."

"Lincoln Highfall! Is that you?"

"I have no reason to deny it, so far," Highfall returned.

Then the two men, ungratefully shoving The Count aside, crept to the rock and placed their lips to openings on either side.

All three babbled incoherently for a time. There were hurried explanations from both sides of the separating boulder, a little sobbing on the part of Janice Trinity. It all came at once, so that Jimps finally took matters in hand and demanded rational speech.

Janice finally told how she had been attracted by the barking of The Count, who, on a lonely tour of exploration, had doubtless wandered down this new-found passage. His keen ears had heard her sobbing on the other side, she thought. And he had set up a frantic yelping to notify her that she was not the only one in distress. She had hastened in the direction of the sound and had been led into a narrow, tunnel-like passage, which grew smaller and smaller as she progressed along it. Then the sounds were close, and she had found herself confronted by the great stone, on the other side of which the dog was barking.

"It took as many men as could crowd into this chute to roll that stone in place," Limpy said. "All three of us couldn't move her in a thousand years. So we may as well quit thinkin' about that."

Janice was about to say something through from her side, but Highfall took the floor.

"Did you find anything, Janice?" he asked.

"Skulls and bones," she told him, "and a green oasis down inside the heart of this butte. There must be water there—and maybe food of some sort—animals and growing things. And there were cliff dwellers' houses in the walls that stand about the oasis, Lincoln!

"But we can't get down to where the trees are growing. At least, I hadn't found a way when I heard your dog barking."

"But we must get down!" cried Highfall. "Janice, you've made a great discovery. You're in the cave, or in the part of *this* cave, that Cyclone Kackley should have directed Barlow and me to look for. He deceived us. There may be wonderful things to be found down there. We simply must find a way to get at them."

"But this rock between us stops all that," said Limpy Jimps. "Do you suppose it's been rolled here and wedged in place by the Indians who lived in this butte?"

"Of course," answered Highfall. "A protective measure. They must have had enemies. Oh, dear! To think of all that may lie before us, and to be kept from it by this."

Janice interrupted him by a shrill cry through her crevice: "Don't worry about the stone between us! I can get it out of the way!"

"What!" cried Limpy. "Have you gone bugs, too?"

"No—listen, Limpy. I have five sticks of dynamite, fuse, dynamite caps, and matches. Two or three correctly placed 'dobe shots will shatter that stone till we can lift the particles out of the way. Thank Heaven, I was raised on the railroad grade! I can lay a 'dobe shot as good as——"

"Listen," Jimps cut in. "I know Highfall has gone off his nut, and I know I'm wabblin', but you must pull yourself together and——"

"Limpy! This is no time to try to be funny. I'm telling you the truth. Old Henry Braman—— And, oh, Limpy, I must tell you something terrible! Mate Cox killed Henry Braman; murdered him in cold blood just because

he suspected he was out here helping me to hunt for you. And——"

"What's that? Cox killed Braman! How d'ye know it was Cox that killed him?"

"He fired just as lightning flashed, Limpy. I saw him plainly. It was Mate Cox."

There followed a long pause. Then said Limpy Jimps:

"Well, that's the best news I've heard yet. Now we've got something on him, and if we ever get out of here alive, we——"

"That's why he is after me," interrupted Janice. "He suspects that I recognized him when he fired. But the dynamite, Limpy——"

Words tumbling over one another, she told about the dead man's cache, and how the explosive had saved her from Cox's gang. "I'll get back to where I left the rest of it," she concluded. "I'll cut long pieces of fuse. When I've lighted the fuse, we must all run back as far away from it as we can before the explosion.

"A shot in here won't be the same as in the open. Hold your fingers in your ears and stand on your toes, both of you. And look out for falling particles of rock that may be jarred loose from the roof of the cave by the shock. It's a rather dangerous proceeding, I know. One is supposed to go out of a tunnel when a shot is fired. Could you go entirely to your entrance, if I cut the fuse long enough? How far is it from here?"

"That's hard to tell," said Highfall. "I suspect that we're hopelessly lost again. But perhaps The Count will help us. He seems to have taken a great fancy to you."

"He thinks she's got a biscuit or somethin'," put in Limpy heartlessly.

"Well, we'll get as far away as possible," Janice continued. "I can get to my entrance, anyway. And if you boys get into another passage I guess you'll be safe. Though there's no telling where the roof may fall, if it's loose in any places. Anyway, it's our only hope of salvation. We simply must take a chance."

"Been takin' 'em all my life," said Limpy. "That's for my part. And Link's with me. We're blood brothers now, Janice. Let's start the fireworks!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DYNAMITE.

THE contrast in environments now showed strongly. Lincoln Highfall was greatly worried over the possible outcome of Janice Trinity's efforts to shatter the rock that separated them. He was positive that the girl would annihilate herself. Firing off charges of dynamite was no occupation for a young lady of her standing, he maintained stoutly.

The sheriff of Caldera County merely laughed at him. He loved Janice as deeply as did the scientist, but he had no fears for her safety. He believed her equal to any task of which she claimed to be master. Because she was a girl had nothing at all to do with it. The situation was dangerous—for all of them—but this was no time to shrink from danger.

The two men and the dog waited some time on their side of the obstruction, while Janice went back to the entrance of her part of the cave for the explosive and the attendant paraphernalia. Presently they heard her voice again.

"I made it all right," she informed them cheerfully. "But I regret, now, having quartered the sticks of dynamite. I could do much more effective work if I had only cut them in half. Well, here goes, anyway."

For some time now there was silence. Then the girl reported:

"All set, boys. Now go to some remote part of the cave and don't re-

turn till you hear the shot. Remember what I told you about standing on your toes and keeping your fingers in your ears. There'll be only one shot at first, so you may come back as soon as you hear it to see what we've accomplished."

Ten minutes afterward, with Limpy Jimps and Highfall waiting in tensity, the butte shook slightly, and the cave was filled with a low roaring caused by the echoes and reverberations of the blast.

"Well, that's that," the sheriff remarked to his companion. "Let's go see if Janice has nicked her any."

When they reached the separating rock they heard the voice of Janice beyond it. "Pretty poor try," she told them. "Charge entirely too small. I cracked it, though, on this side. How about it over there?"

Highfall played the electric torch, but neither he nor Limpy Jimps could find a crack in the stubborn stone.

"Never mind," the girl said. "Another quarter stick will show it a thing or two, now that it's cracked."

They repeated the performance. This time, when the two men returned, they found a wide break on their side, running perpendicularly through the middle of the rock.

"That's fine," the girl said chokingly, for the fumes of the explosion were pungent in that shut-up place. "I can lay another one in the big crack now, and I think we'll do some business."

But she was obliged to cease work presently and go out for pure air. The fumes drifted away slowly along the passages, and it was nearly half an hour before the others heard her voice again.

"I'm not going to take any chances this time," she decided. "We have our six-shooters, Limpy, and plenty of ammunition. So we won't be unarmed even if I do use all of the dynamite. I'm going to shoot the whole works at once. If I don't, I'm afraid we'll putter along with these quarter sticks and accomplish nothing. We'll just simply have to take a chance."

This time, when the explosion came, the shock was stunning. Highfall was tottered off his feet and nearly fell flat. Jimps was shaken tremendously. It seemed to the two that the entire butte rocked back and forth as if from an earthquake.

They hastened forward, Highfall playing the light. Suddenly Limpy reached ahead and grabbed his shoulders, jerking him back with such force that he sprawled on the floor of the cave.

In that instant, just where the young man would have stepped if the sheriff had not acted quickly, a mass of rock slid down one wall of the passage and crashed on the floor. Lincoln regained his feet.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Close shave. Thanks, Limpy Jimps."

They hastened on after this, watching the roof and walls carefully. Soon Lincoln gave a shout:

"Janice!"

The girl was walking toward them, her trim figure outlined by the shaft of brilliancy from the torch. The barrier was down. She had passed beyond it and was walking toward them.

She walked on tiptoe, a finger laid on her lips for silence. Then came her voice, just above a whisper:

"Lincoln, don't shout that way. You're taking your life in your hands. There is loose stone in this cave, and even to whisper is dangerous."

She had barely ceased speaking when, from some inner chamber of the huge cave, there came a low roaring, like big trees swishing in the wind.

"There! Hear that!" The girl, who had now reached them, was speaking in a whisper. "That's a cave-in, some place. We must get out of here immediately. Not a moment to lose. Time for congratulations later. Follow

me on tiptoe. Step softly and make no sound."

The men did her bidding. As they stole along toward the shattered obstacle they heard from various parts of the cave, low grumbling sounds—as portions of loosened stones gave up their hold on the ceiling and dropped to the floor.

Like a wraith the intrepid girl moved on ahead of them. Carefully they crawled over the débris left by the last shot and entered her part of the cave on hands and knees. Then, as they stood erect to forge ahead to the entrance that overlooked the locked oasis, the roof gave way behind them, directly over the place where the obstructing rock had stood. The passage they had just left was filled with broken stone; to pass back the way they had come was impossible.

Janice, ahead, was running now—running on tiptoe and as lightly as she could. The others kept at her heels, treading softly but making haste.

As there came another stunning crash behind them, light streamed in their faces—a round disc of sunlight completely surrounded by black.

"At last!" whispered Janice.

With crash following crash behind them, they reached the opening and came out upon the narrow shelf that overhung the green-walled valley which was their ultimate goal.

Limpy Jimps took one look at it, and then erased it from his mind as if to gain it were of no importance. There was something that thrilled him more. He stepped to the dark-eyed girl and laid both hands on her shoulders. For several moments he looked into her eyes, even until her black lashes were lowered in confusion. Then Limpy spoke two words, no more.

"Wonderful girl," he said; he dropped his hands to his sides again.

Limpy turned away abruptly. Never before in his life had the sheriff of Caldera County displayed sentiment over a woman. His face was flaming, and his hands shook. He walked to the edge of the shelf and looked down upon the inviting greenery below, not daring to look either at Highfall or the girl.

He realized that the two were holding conversation behind his back, but his ears were drumming so that he could not distinguish words. He clenched his hands presently and turned to face them.

"We must find a way to get down there," he said shortly. "You say there's no outside trail, Janice?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then there must be an inside passage—a stone stairway, I'd say. Let's find it."

"But won't it be dangerous to go back in there?" asked Lincoln.

"It will," Limpy agreed. "But we're starving. And now those slides in there have cut us off from our water supply. There's water in that sink. We must get down to it."

"There are clouds high in the sky over the mountains," Janice said, pointing up and to the west. "We may get more rain soon."

"I noticed them," Limpy told her, "but we can't depend on rain."

Cautiously they reëntered the cave. Janice told them that she had looked for a passage only on the right, considering that that was the logical place for it to be. Since she had not discovered it, the sheriff now suggested that they investigate along the course that she had come when she found the shelf. There was a bare chance that she had passed it without observing it.

They stood a long time about fifty feet from the entrance. They heard no more cave-ins, so decided to press on and take a chance. Limpy, with the torch, led the way. Highfall brought up the rear, with The Count of Monte Cristo trotting at his heels.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BROKEN TRAIL.

THE excitement over, Limpy Jimps and Lincoln Highfall began to feel the reaction. Half-starved though they were, the tensity of the past hour had buoyed them up like cocaine, and they had felt neither fatigue nor emptiness. Now, however, they found themselves pitiably weak. As they moved through the girl's part of the cave in search of a stone stairway leading down to the walled oasis, they were faint and dizzy, and were barely able to drag their feet along.

Janice, too, was tormented, but she had been afflicted a much shorter time than had her male companions, so her suffering was not so poignant.

They moved slowly along the various passages, listening for further evidences of the falling roof, ready to run for safety at a moment's warning. They heard one more slide, far distant, during their search for the stairway; but, aside from that, all was silence.

Suddenly, as they made a sharp turn, light again glowed in their faces on the right.

"Another entrance," whispered Janice, still fearful that loud sounds might dislodge loose stones and send them clattering about them.

No more was said. They walked toward the gigantic round eye of sunlight, and presently found themselves in the open again, on a shelf similar to the one from which the girl had first viewed the green oasis in the heart of the stony butte.

This shelf was no longer than the other one. It overhung the oasis like a tiny balcony, and the walls below it dropped sheer.

Sheriff Jimps moved cautiously toward the edge. He was so weak from deprivation that he dared not trust his legs. Close to the edge he lowered himself slowly to his knees, then crawled forward to peer down upon the inviting green.

Immediately he saw a trail, winding in and out along the face of the rock wall, until it reached the level of the floor below. "I've got it," he announced, without excitement. "There is no inside stairway, I guess, but I see a trail running down. And the beginnin' of it is on this shelf."

He crawled back from the dizzying view and rose shakily to his feet.

"Over there," he said, pointing to the left; "it must start there."

They walked in the direction indicated and came to the southern end of the shelf. But when they looked over the edge they saw no trail.

"There it is!" cried Highfall, pointing. "It's—oh, we can never reach it."

It was true. Ahead of them, about twenty feet, they saw the ragged end of the trail. At some far distant time the trail actually had extended to the shelf on which they stood, but the erosions of centuries had broken down that part of it which had connected directly with the shelf. Not over twenty feet from them lay a well-defined, rocky path leading downward. Between them and it lay a chasm which they had no means of crossing.

Highfall was mumbling: "Masonry here, once. What we can see of the trail was a built-up affair and couldn't outlast the centuries."

Janice said nothing, but stood biting her red lips. Jimps sat down. The yellow dog slunk forward and looked across at the inaccessible trail as if he understood.

"I'm wondering," said the sheriff, "if I couldn't cut my leather chaps into strings and plait a rope that would get us across that break. If I only had my lariat!"

"There's a rock projection over there," said Janice quietly. "You might be able to rope it."

Limpy estimated the distance. "I

could just about make it with my thirty-five-foot lariat," he decided, "if I used a small noose. But it would be hard to throw a rope made outa my chaps. Too light, you know. Still, it might be done. But I'm plumb weak, I can tell you that. And a rope that's too light is mighty hard to throw, even when a fellow's strong and full o' pep.

"That ain't what's worryin' me most, though," he continued. "I'm wonderin' if there's enough material in my chaps to make a rope thirty-five feet long, strong enough to hold the weight of a man. I'm thinkin' not, Janice. It would have to be braided three-ply, at least, before I'd trust my weight on it —and my chaps just naturally ain't big enough for the job. I never took to these big, fancy bat-wings that the dude cowboys wear on their chaps. Mine are more modestlike."

"We have our two cartridge belts, you know," the girl reminded him. "They could be cut into strips and added."

Limpy shook his head. "Not enough stuff even then," he opined.

"Limpy!" cried Janice suddenly. "The fuse! There was a whole coil of it, and I used very little. We could get that and add it to the rope."

Limpy Jimps pondered.

"It oughta be pretty tough," he mused. "But where is it?"

"Back at the eastern entrance, where I first came into the cave."

"Then that let's the fuse out," the sheriff told her. "It's too dangerous an undertaking for any of us to go back in there and walk clean to the other side."

"I'll go," said Lincoln Highfall unexpectedly.

Limpy Jimps looked him over with fond eyes. Then he jerked his head at Janice and winked.

"Not bad, for a bone hunter, eh?" he asked, chuckling. "I'm beginnin' to like this fella, Janice."

"Stop fooling," Highfall rebuked him. "Janice, tell me where to find the fuse."

"Don't try it," said Limpy in a decisive tone. "If any one goes, it'll be me. But nobody's goin'. It's a bet, anyway. None of us knows the strength of that fuse. It wasn't made to bear a weight. The risk is too great when we ain't sure o' the result."

"Then what *can* we do, Limpy?" cried Janice, and there was a panicky tone to her voice that the sheriff didn't like to hear.

"I hate to say it," he replied, after a thoughtful pause, "but it looks, folks, as if we're pretty much up against it. We've no water. We've nothing to eat except The Count of Monte Cristo, and he's been such a friend in need that I'm sentimental enough to starve before I'd take his life to save my own. He found you for us, Janice. And if ever we get outa here alive, that dog is gonta sleep on a velvet pillow trimmed with satin; and on it there'll be embroidered: 'To The Count of Monte Cristo—From His Uncle Limpy Jimps.'"

"Can't you be serious even in a situation like this, Limpy?" scolded Highfall.

"What's the use?" retorted Limpy. "Bein' serious won't help us any. If we had a deck o' cards, Link, I'd suggest playin' poker for pebbles—anything to keep our minds off this thing."

"And, for all we know," said Highfall, lisping, "we may be hemmed in here by those blasts. We know that one passage was closed behind us. Maybe others have fared the same. Even if we had plenty to eat and drink, we might he doomed to spend the remainder of our lives inside this butte."

"Right for you, Mr. Highfall," replied Jimps, "and that's why I'm itchin' for a game o' poker, or some quiet

little diversion like that, which don't require much physical effort.

"But there's one hope starin' us in the face. Maybe you've noticed it."

"The clouds still thickening over the mountains?" asked the girl.

"Yes, ma'am," Limpy answered her. "Just that. They're lots heavier than when we saw 'em last. We'll be havin' water, I guess, before this day's over. And water's the main thing, after all. It fills you up, and when you're all nice and swelled with it you can kid yourself into thinkin' you've had a feed. I'd rather starve than choke for water any day."

He fell silent, the other two watching him as if they believed that in him alone lay their only hope for a final solution of the problem.

"I'll tell you what," he said presently. "Let's all find a cozy corner apiece and lie down for a little sleep. We've all lost a lot of it. It'll build up the wasted tissues and do us a lot o' good. And ideas sit down on my brain pan when I'm droppin' off to sleep. Let's try it."

There seemed nothing else to do. Sleep, if it would come to them, would make them forget their peril. The girl's eyes were heavy, and she was the first to give an O. K. to the proposal. They sought recesses in the rocky wall and lay down quietly, hoping for prompt oblivion.

Half an hour had passed before the sheriff stirred. He got to his knees, crept out softly. He moved along noiselessly to where Lincoln Highfall lay, and rested on his knees, listening.

A gentle snoring told him that the scientist was sound asleep. Then he crept to Janice's niche.

There she lay, her dark head resting on one rounded arm, her bosom rising and falling regularly. For several moments the sheriff gazed at her. Never before had he looked upon such an entrancing picture.

Then softly, timorously, he crept forward, slowly lowered his head, and placed his stubble-bearded lips to the tips of her fingers.

Swiftly, silently he drew back—kept on backing on his knees until he had rounded a stone that hid her. Then he stood erect, withdrew his six-gun from its holster, threw out the cylinder, made sure that every chamber was loaded, and thrust the weapon home again. As softly as possible he entered the cave and clicked on the light of the electric torch.

Ten minutes later, having crawled over several piles of fallen rock and gropingly found the entrance by which the girl had entered, he stood on the eastern side of the butte, looking down on the relentless desert where Cox's gang was camped and waiting like buzzards for their prey.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SECRET OF THE CENTURIES.

THE sheriff of Caldera County didn't know whether or not he was acting wisely in deserting his comrades in distress to hasten along the inevitable fight with Cox and his men. There was one thing certain in his mind: To remain on the shelf on the other side of the cave meant a cruel death before many days had passed. To open hostilities with Cox seemed to be the only chance for freedom. This way he might win; the other way he *could* not win.

He found a parapet before this entrance, similar to the one before the entrance by which he had invaded the other part of the cave. Limping to it, he found it too high for him to see over, and so laboriously crawled upon it. Worming his way forward, he looked down upon the wide, yellow desert for signs of life. He saw neither horse nor burro. If any members of Cox's gang were watching the entrance

behind him, they were diligently keeping out of sight.

Limpy thought. Janice's flight into the caves would have made it necessary for Cox to split his gang in order to watch another entrance. How many men were waiting down there, like hungry wolves, he did not know. It was probable that, thinking he had a fortune almost within his grasp, Mate Cox would virtually let his cattle shift for themselves up in the stormy mountains. That would mean that at least half a dozen men were watching the prisoners.

Limpy cast his glance far across the level land. There was no movement to be seen which might mean the coming of a rescue party. He heaved a mighty sight as he slid back on his feet again.

Of course, posses were hunting for the lost ones, but the sheriff knew well that they did not know where to hunt. The recent rains, he thought, would have obliterated all tracks. Henry Braman was dead; his body perhaps long since hidden. Bill Caldona and his men could obtain no information from him. If they chanced that way in their search, Cox would have his men in hiding.

Limpy Jimps made ready to slip down the trail, and have it over with. The chances were great that only two men were guarding the entrance that Janice Trinity had taken. If he could win a fight with them, he could take their guns, which would better the situation of his friends and himself even if he were obliged to flee up the trail again to avoid other members of the gang. Also, he might find grub down there. That was the main thing—something to eat.

Just as he started down the trail he heard, from far within the cave, a low, ominous grumbling, which bespoke another slide. It caused him to turn his head toward the entrance, and in that instant he saw something that changed his plans entirely.

It was a long, black, snaky thing which, because of the sudden light in his eyes, he had not noticed on coming out. It lay just beyond the mouth of the cave.

"There's that fuse," he muttered, and paused, thoughtful.

Janice, in her hurry, had dragged it from its hiding place to cut off the lengths required, and, under the excitement of the moment, had neglected to secrete it again.

Limpy turned back into the cave, picked up one end of it, and studied it. Then he hung a loop of it over a projection above his head and put his entire weight on it.

"Strong stuff," he decided. "Doubled, it might cut the mustard."

He picked up the coil. On it was a printed label, containing, in part, the information that originally the coil had comprised sixty feet.

"By golly, it's a chance!" he muttered. "If we get down in that oasis, we can at least find water and green things to nibble on. Horses live on that—we can, for a long time, I guess. I'll try it."

Limpy Jimps did not fear death, himself. Had he been alone, he would have marched out long since and taken up the cudgels with Cox and his men, win or lose. But all along he had had Highfall to consider. Now he had some one dearer even than the manly young Easterner of whom he had become so fond during the past few days.

If he were killed in a gun fight, what would happen to Janice? This was what caused him to grasp at any straw which might offer a betterment of their condition rather than risking his life in a fight with Cox. Limpy's life was not his own now. It belonged to Janice, and for her it must be preserved until she was safe in her father's arms again.

He crawled back over the piles of muck, lighted the electric torch once more, and made his way on to the shelf that overlooked the walled oasis. He heard two or three slight slides during the trip, but none of them were close to him. Again he came out into the open, barely noticing the black clouds that now were drifting overhead, so intent was he on the business of the moment. The girl and Lincoln Highfall were still asleep, he found.

He sat down on a loose stone and unrolled the fuse, twisting it this way and that to make it as limber as he could. He tied a slip knot, made a wide noose. Then he coiled the remainder in his left hand and stood on his feet.

He stepped close to the edge and began circling the noose over his head. With his eyes fixed on the sturdy-looking projection across the chasm, he swung the noose faster and faster. Suddenly it left his right hand, sang through the air, and settled nicely about the upright stone beyond the gulf.

"M-m! Not so bad for a has-been," he complimented himself.

With his pocketknife he cut the fuse in the middle and fastened his end of the caught part to a stone at his feet. He made another noose of the remainder, threw, missed, and drew it in again.

The second cast was satisfactory. He drew the two strands taut, and discovered that he had ten feet to spare, which he could tie about an irregular projection on the shelf. He tied them temporarily, then went and awoke Janice and Lincoln Highfall.

In their delight over his accomplishment, they neglected to upbraid him for risking his life by crossing through the buttes Relief was in sight, and, though to cross hand over hand on the impromptu cable was a ticklish undertaking, neither the girl nor Highfall shrank from it.

"First," said Limpy, "we'll give her a more thorough test than I was able to in the other entrance. Let's all three of us take hold of her and pull for all that's in us. If she holds, we'll be ridin' high, wide, and han'some. For there's grub and drink down there in that little world o' promise that's shut off from the rest of the universe. This is the supreme test, boys and girls. Let's give her all we got."

The three of them laid hold on the two strands.

"Now," said Limpy, "give her a heave. Give her a *one* heave! Give her a *two!* Give her a *three!*"

Then, without an instant's warning, all three of them pitched backward in a pile as something gave way on the other side.

Limpy Jimps was the first to regain his feet. He stood, staring stupidly across the chasm. The two strands of fuse had been jerked from their hands. They heard a dull rumbling far below them as the unmoored stone that had stood across the gulf went caroming from rock to rock in its swift descent to the floor of the walled oasis.

"It wasn't solid," muttered Highfall, gulping. "It—it was a part of the masonry of the built-up part of the trail."

"You're right, son," said Limpy grimly. "And that ends that."

Janice succumbed to the great strain that was on her and sank to the ground, sobbing. Highfall and Limpy Jimps looked at her uncomfortably, but were unable to soothe her.

As Limpy Jimps looked at her commiseratingly, cursing himself for his helplessness, rain drops splashed in his face.

He gave a shout of triumph. He stepped to the girl's side and boldly lifted her bowed head, with one bronzed hand under her chin.

"Cheer up, pard!" he cried, laughing.

"The water wagon's comin'! We'll soon have plenty to drink, and——"

The storm burst furiously and drowned his final words. In a few moments the three of them were working frantically to catch all the water possible, as it trickled down the grim face of the butte into their upheld hats.

As Jimps and Highfall had done on a former occasion, the three carried their hats, filled with the precious water, into the cave and emptied them into crevices of the floor. The storm was spasmodic, and it did not rain for over twenty minutes. But it poured down so fast that in that length of time they secured enough water to last them several days.

They were happier now. Janice had been sorely in need of water, and when she had drunk her fill her spirits lifted immeasurably.

Half an hour afterward, as they were sitting in the mouth of the cave where the floor was dry, a familiar sound drifted to their ears. It was the tinkling bark of the yellow dog, coming from far within the cavern.

"By golly, every time that cur wanders off he gets snarled up in an adventure," said Limpy Jimps. "But what is it now, and how'd he slip away without us seein' 'im?"

They listened. Again and again came the sharp barking. But the sounds this time were different than when the two men had heard his joyful greeting of the girl.

"That dog's mad," decided Jimps; "mad or scared. Listen at 'im! That isn't any how-d'ye-do bark, boys and girls. That's a what's-this-thing bark! That ole ki-yi has snooped into something that don't set well on his stomach. Janice, think ye could eat raw coyote meat?"

Janice shuddered.

"No time for funning," Highfall pointed out. "It's dangerous for him to bark like that in there. The least sound, as we have good reason to know, may dislodge stones over his head. He'll be crushed. I'm going after him!"

Before Janice or Jimps could raise a protest over his own danger, the young man had leaped to his feet, snatched up the electric torch, and dashed into the gloom of the interior.

Then Limpy found his wits and ran after him. Janice, perhaps fearful of being left alone, ran after Jimps. As they drew closer to the sounds they were aware that The Count of Monte Cristo was in the midst of the great adventure of his life. His barks were sharp and frantic, and now and then he whined and snarled.

Then suddenly they came upon him. He was in a passage that extended laterally to the right from the main one. Before him was a huge pile of loose rock that had fallen after the blasting.

There he stood, revealed in the electric light, legs planted, hair bristling, yipping furiously, afraid to stay, and afraid to run.

"Great guns!" gasped out Jimps, almost dropping his six-shooter and staring up into a cavity in the roof from which the muck had fallen.

Six figures stared down at him. Six tiny manlike figures, all in a row. They were wizened-looking little men, no larger than boys of ten or twelve, but their faces looked as old as the rocks about them. The skin was brown and wrinkled and drawn taut over their puny skulls. Their slender fingers were crooked like the talons of a bird of prey. They grinned hideously, stiff lips spread like the lips of a snarling wolf.

"Mummies!" gasped out Lincoln Highfall; "men of the lost tribes of cliff dwellers. Limpy, boost me up in there. I must see more, even though

this may be my dying day! Don't argue with me! Boost me up!"

There was something commanding about Lincoln Highfall now, and silently Jimps pushed the yelping dog aside, laid hold of his friend's legs, and, with all the strength that was left him, helped him into the exposed cavity as if into the attic of a house.

Janice stooped and patted the dog, trying to stop his barking. Jimps stood, hands on hips, looking up at the hole through which Highfall had disappeared, strangely awed by these age-old mysteries.

Then unexpectedly the face of Highfall showed. He stared down at them, his eyes big, his lips working, his tongue licking them in excitement.

When he spoke his voice was calm, and there was no lisp. "I will be down presently," he stated simply, "and then we'll eat. Don't laugh at me. I'm serious. I haven't lost my reason. I've found it—food. It's two thousand years old—but it's fit for us to eat!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THROUGH CLOUDS OF SMOKE.

FOUR days had passed since Lincoln Highfall made the statement which had caused Janice Trinity and Limpy Jimps to fear that the young man had lost his mind. Four days—and they were still alive and in far better physical condition than on the day of the great discovery.

They were encamped in a mouth of the cave that overlooked the walled oasis. Farther within the cave there still remained, in cups of the rocky floor, an ample supply of water. It had rained again, and they had added to their store. There was sufficient, now, to last them for a month.

Against one wall of the cave lay a huge collection of relics that were dear to the heart of the ethnographer. There were many pottery vessels, centuries and centuries old. There were ancient planting sticks—so many of these, in fact, that the imprisoned trio had been using them for kindling wood. There were charred baskets, sandals, calcined bones as brittle as icicles, and an assortment of turquoise jewelry which Highfall prophesied would set the scientific world agog.

There were mummies, wonderfully preserved by the desiccating air of the desert. There were rare examples of Indian textile work—women's aprons made of feathers, coats, a remarkably well-preserved drum, and other articles over which the scientist's eyes roved fondly from sun to sun.

Up above the roof of the cave, in which might be called a loft, Highfall had found a burial vault of the forgotten tribes who had made the pink-and-yellow butte their home. There he had discovered enough strange hieroglyphics carved on the rock walls, and painted, to keep him studying over their meaning for many years. There, too, he had found dry, solid logs, upholding a portion of the upper roof, and which the three now were using for firewood.

Most important of all were hundreds and hundreds of ears of corn, carefully ranged in rows in a huge storage bin—corn that had been placed there by patient brown hands before Herod Agrippa was made king of Judea; before Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide; before Cæsar crossed the Rubicon.

This ancient cereal, as firm and fresh and edible as the day it had been stored away, had saved the lives of the imperiled prisoners. They ground it between stones and made meal of it, which, when worked into a paste with water and baked on a hot rock, seemed the most delicious food that they had ever eaten. During all those bygone centuries the stout masonry of the dead people had held this corn in close storage. For all that the bene-

ficiaries knew, centuries more might have passed before it was discovered, had it not been for the shocks from the explosions in the cave.

Now the three were simply waiting. They knew that they could live for many days on corn-meal cakes and water; they knew, too, that Cox's gang had no knowledge of their windfall.

"Any time, now, they'll be comin'," Jimps had told his companions again and again. "They'll think we can't hold out much longer, and they'll be comin' up to hunt for our skeletons, to make sure we're dead before goin' on about their more important affairs. Then, folks—then comes the big surprise."

"What do you think will be the final result, Limpy?" Janice asked to-day.

Limpy Jimps shook his head, and his black Spanish eyes looked inscrutably into hers. "Can't tell," he said; "can't tell. They undoubtedly heard the shots that you fired, though Link and I didn't hear anything when you threw the stick of dynamite on the other side. But we were in the cave and wouldn't be likely to hear an outside shot, while they were in the open, and would surely hear an explosion in the cave. So they'll think you haven't any dynamite left, perhaps. That'll send 'em up all the quicker, I'm thinkin'. Yes, we can look for 'em any time now. Got to keep our eyes open."

"They'll probably investigate your part of the cave first, won't they?"

"I'd say not," the sheriff replied. "You see, they're more anxious to know what's happened to you, than to Link and me. They figure that this old gobbler and I will keep. They know I'm tough, at any rate. But they'll figure that you can't hold out so long, bein' a woman. As things stand now, they're more anxious to get you than they are Link and me. You know too much."

"So you think they'll come here first?" Highfall put in.

"That's the way I dope it out, Link," the sheriff told him. "And while I don't like to hurt the feelin's of The Count of Monte Cristo, nor disturb the placid calm of his days, I'm gonta tie him up a short way inside the cave."

"What for?" asked the girl.

"So's he'll let us know when Cox and his little playmates are on the war-path."

"That's not a bad idea, Limpy," said Lincoln.

"I thank you," said Limpy Jimps. "Now and then I get a good one, don't I?"

The Count of Monte Cristo, much to his disappointment and chagrin, was led into the cave about fifty feet, and tied to a projecting rock with the strip of whang. A short piece of the same material, tied about his nose, prevented him from chewing at his bonds, but would not keep him from growling out a warning if the gang came stealing through the cave.

He cried at first, and the three were fearful that the sounds would dislodge more loose stones in the cave; but it seemed that no more débris was due to fall in that part of it. Nothing happened. Finally Monte Cristo settled down, his muzzle on his paws, and his keen little eyes fixed on his friends in the entrance. He seemed to understand that this sacrifice was necessary and must be undergone.

The day dragged on. The clouds had vanished from the sky, and a portentous stillness overhung the desert and the walled oasis. The three were nervous, for it seemed that there was something ominous in the silent air. Now and then The Count whined fretfully; when he did so the girl and the two men started and tried to pierce the gloom of the cave's interior with anxious eyes.

Two o'clock came. The sun beat down mercilessly on the little shelf before the entrance, so that the prisoners

were driven into the shade of the opening. They had barely settled themselves after this move when Janice Trinity whispered, with a catch in her throat:

"Look, Limpy! Look at Monte Cristo!"

The dog was still lying down, but his ragged ears were cocked forward and pointing away from his friends. His tail, extended in their direction, did not wag. He had ceased to whine, but his body had stiffened, and his whole attitude was one of acute expectancy.

Then briskly he rose to his feet, glanced back briefly, and then quickly centered his attention on the interior once more, one ear back and one forward.

"The curtain's about to rise," said Limpy Jimps softly, as he leaped noiselessly to his feet and darted into the cave.

With quick movements he untied the dog and, dragging him behind him, ran back to the shelf.

"Link—hold 'im!" he ordered, passing the whang leather into the ethnographer's hands. "Janice, how's the old gat?"

"All ready," said the girl, through pale lips.

"Remember to shoot low," the sheriff cautioned. "Here, let me show you. Handle her like this."

He took the Colt .38 from the girl's hand, leveled it at the height of his waist, holding the barrel with his left hand.

"Just give it to 'em that way," he said, "if they get too close. Some of the best gunmen in the West use that double-handed method in a tight place. You ain't so likely to shoot over their heads.

"Now stand to the right of the entrance," he continued his instructions. "I'll take the left. Link, you look out for yourself. For the present, give your entire attention to keepin' the dog quiet.

"Janice, let 'em have it when I say the word. Shoot low! Get that in your mind and don't forget it. We got the best of it by far. Comin' toward the bright entrance through the cave, their eyes will be dazzled. Get 'em while they're—— Look out! They're comin'!"

There were a few moments of breathless silence. Janice felt her brain reeling. Her knees wanted to give way beneath her. Her hands, both holding the gun, shook like a leaf in the wind.

She wet her lips and glanced at Limpy Jimps, crouching on the other side of the entrance. He was as immovable as the rocks about him, his black Spanish eyes shining in the sunlight as their keen glance stabbed through the gloomy cave. She watched the big .45 in his right hand. He held it waist-high, resting against his body. His left hand encircled the long, shiny barrel.

He made a picture that she was never to forget. It revived her waning courage, and she bit her lower lip, grasping her gun more firmly. Her wandering wits came back to her. She fought for strength and gained it.

Voices were heard. No words were distinguishable as the sounds came tumbling through the cave, mingled with elusive echoes and mocking reverberations till the result was merely an uncanny, meaningless jumble of galloping syllables.

Then the heart of the girl seemed to leap up into her throat and choke her. The stunning report of the sheriff's .45, though fully expected, struck her taut nerves like a blow in the back of the head.

From within the cave came a hoarse scream. Shouts followed it. Again the sheriff's big gun belched orange fire and smoke. The smoke drifted lazily away outside the cave. The pungent

smell of it stung the delicate membrane of the girl's nostrils.

Inside the cave all was confusion. There were shouts, hoarse curses, the sounds of running feet. These all blended in a hullabaloo of noise, and in the midst of it Limpy Jimps fired a third time.

Suddenly Janice got a second grip on herself. Miraculously she steadied. She realized that this was the supreme moment of her life, that she must do or die—and that she was not helping Limpy Jimps in his lone-hand battle with the Cox gang.

Then it was that she leaned carefully out around the rock which hid her, took deliberate aim at the dusky forms milling about inside the cave, and pressed the trigger.

Not until then did the surprised outlaws begin to shoot. There came a roar of shots from inside, as if a dozen guns had been fired simultaneously. The echoes fairly rumbled; the mouth of the cave filled suddenly with smoke which hung there like a cloud.

Then it seemed that the world was being split asunder. From the cave came a dull roar, low at first but increasing steadily in volume, until it seemed as if hundreds of heavy batteries were firing at a distance as fast as the great guns could be reloaded and discharged.

Above this terrible roaring came the sheriff's voice: "The roof is fallin' everywhere, Janice! Their shots did it! They're gone!"

The roaring and crashing continued in a dull rumble, billow of sound following billow of sound. Above the hideous uproar rose shrill cries of utter terror, as section after section of the treacherous roof gave way above the heads of the gang and buried them.

Out of the smoke plunged a figure, low, squat, crouched. There was a flash of fire, the resounding report of a heavy gun. Next instant Mate Cox and Sheriff Jimps were locked in each other's arms, and reeling about on the narrow shelf that overhung the walled oasis.

Janice screamed, lifted her gun, but dared not fire for fear of hitting Limpy. The sheriff himself had had no chance to use his gun as the squat figure came lunging out upon him, for the heavy rack of smoke in the entrance had completely hidden everything within the cave.

Whether Jimps or Mate Cox had fired that last shot, Janice did not know. Nor did she know whether either of the combatants was wounded. It was all like a terrible nightmare, and she could only stand and stare at the struggling men.

Then a figure crashed into her, nearly knocking her off her feet. Another man had darted through the smoke and reached the narrow shelf. There came a hoarse shout:

"Get Jimps!"

Then, quite close, there came a loud report, and her revolver jerked unexpectedly in her hand and clattered on the stones.

Through the smoke she saw a figure reeling, staggering, twisting about grotesquely. For an instant she saw a pain-distorted face directly before her eyes; suddenly the entire figure vanished.

It was not till then that the terrorized girl realized she had shot this second gunman, who came leaping through the smoke to crash against her. She had shot him, either killed him or wounded him desperately, and he had staggered blindly to the edge of the rocky shelf, plunging down to the walled oasis that gaped up from below.

She caught sight of Lincoln Highfall. He lay flat on his back, close to the lip of the precipice, a crimson stream trickling from his breast. At one side stood the yellow dog, short legs planted, the hair bristling on his

back, whining piteously and without cessation.

Then he gave a smothered cry of terror and leaped for safety. Over him staggered Limpy Jimps and Mate Cox, locked in each other's arms, neither of them able to use his gun. This way and that they rocked, drawing nearer and nearer to the fatal plunge.

Janice stood rooted to the spot, unable to move, moaning: "Limpy! Oh, Limpy!"

In that tense instant she knew that she loved this man, and that if he did not win this desperate battle, her life would be empty for the remainder of her days.

On the very edge of the precipice, both men went down, the sheriff of Caldera County on top. There came a sickening thud; a groan that died out in a rattle.

Next instant Limpy Jimps was standing before her, a quaint smile on his bronzed face.

"Janice," he said, "will you get that strip o' whang leather off the dog so I can tie Cox's wrists with it? I've got to take 'im in for the murder of Henry Braman, and I haven't any handcuffs."

Janice glanced once at the immovable figure of Mate Cox, stretched out on the rocks. Then she swayed into the arms of Limpy Jimps and began to sob softly against his shoulder.

"There, there!" he soothed her. "It's all over now. Poor old Link stopped a chunk o' lead, but you and I are whole. And the Cox gang is no more. The rest o' them are buried underneath the muck in there. Don't cry, Janice."

She lifted her face and smiled, tears trickling down her cheeks. "I—I'm crying because I'm glad," she said brokenly. "I—I wanted you to live, Limpy!"

"Why?" The sheriff of Caldera County was now trembling as hope began to dawn.

"I—I think I love you," Janice said. "I guess that's why."

The cave, the walled oasis, the butte, and even the sky above him faded from the vision of Limpy Jimps. There was but one thing in the world worth considering—and that was in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A WAY TO GET JIMPS.

THE sheriff of Caldera County and Janice Trinity were married early on the morning of the great barbecue which the girl's father gave to start the ball rolling in his immense project to reclaim the desert. Lincoln Highfall, not so seriously wounded as Jimps had at first suspected, was able to act as best man, though he was carried to the ceremony on a stretcher.

The three had undergone great difficulties and dangers in getting out of the ruined cave. They had not dared to try it until the day following the battle, for the slides continued for a long time after the fusillade of shots from the firearms of the gang had started them.

Jimps had finally undertaken the perilous passage, eventually finding a way through for all of them. It had been a difficult task to get the wounded scientist out, but Jimps was accustomed to conquering difficult tasks.

Every member of the gang who had participated in the prolonged conflict with the three had perished. The man whom Janice had shot, and who had staggered over the brink to plunge to the floor of the walled oasis, was "Squinty" Laub. Three days after the delivery of Janice, Lincoln, and Limpy Jimps, the latter rode into the mountains, where he found, at Cox's summer headquarters, the two men that he had wounded on the abandoned road. He brought them in, charged with an attempt at highway robbery, and lodged them in the county jail.

Once out of the cave of horrors, the tormented trio had readily found the horses and burros—all excepting Janice's white, who had returned straight to camp after the shooting of Henry Braman, and the one that Tom Barlow had ridden. Bill Caldona's posse had tried to follow the back tracks of Janice's horse, and had succeeded for a way, but the heavy rains soon washed them out so that their efforts at finding the lost ones had been futile.

It was generally believed that, when Cox's gang had gone up to the caves to learn the fate of their prisoners, Tom Barlow had seized this opportunity to ride away He had kept on riding toward some new loafing place, knowing that his already insecure popularity would be gone entirely, if he returned to Heroina, and the truth came out.

The big barbecue was in full swing now, for "Brickbat" Trinity had not stopped his preparations, even though almost distracted over the loss of his daughter. He had promised, and Brickbat Trinity had a reputation for making good. There was a band from a distant city. Cow-punchers had ridden in from far-off ranches to contest with one another for the handsome prizes offered. There were automobiles to carry prospective land purchasers over the country. There were dancing and feasting. The salesmen that Brickbat had engaged for the occasion were earning big commissions and working fast.

In the midst of the festivities Bill Caldona came to Limpy Jimps, who was acting as general manager of everything, even though he found it extremely difficult to forget, temporarily, that the amazing girl called Janice was now his wife.

"Cox wants to see you a minute, Limp," said the deputy sheriff.

"Thunder! What about? I'm busy."

"He didn't say. But I'd see him, Limpy. That bird's never gonta stand trial for the murder o' Henry Braman. He's gonta cash in his chips before to-morrow night, the railroad doctor says."

"All right," the sheriff agreed; "I'll see what he wants."

Mate Cox was being held in the little adobe jail back of the sheriff's office. He could be made as comfortable there as in the small shack that served for a hospital at the farther end of the town.

Limpy knew, as soon as he entered, that Cox could not last long. His heart softened toward the dying man as he tried to raise his head from the pillow and held out a shaky hand.

"Jimps," he said, croaking, "you win."

"I guess so," the sheriff returned, greatly embarrassed.

"I played the wrong game and lost," Cox continued. "I don't know how I got started at it. I ain't naturally mean. I was decent once."

Limpy nodded, still uncomfortable.

"I've been a low-down coyote, Jimps," the shaky tones went on. "But you're a man. I always admired you, even while I was after you hardest. And I guess, in a way, you admired me —didn't ye?"

"Yes, in a way," Limpy agreed. "You're a fightin' fool and full of courage. If you'd only directed your efforts——"

"Yes, I know. No lecturin'. Jimps, I'm goin'. A few more hours and Heroina won't be bothered with Cox any more. I was in the clutches o' that Squinty Laub, Jimps. My property is mortgaged to him. He didn't make me shoot up Heroina, but he did make me do that other stuff—puttin' away men that he sent out with money in their pockets to get jobs at places that never existed. But now he's dead. I reckon I hadn't ought to say it, when I'm goin' so soon, too, but I guess I'm glad. You and Heroina won't be

troubled any more with him or me. Jimps—do somethin' for me?"

"Anything I can, Mate."

"Get a lawyer and have 'im draw up my will. I got an old mother back East. I want her to have what's left of my property after Squinty Laub's estate, if he's got one, has got theirs. And I want you to be my executor, Jimps. Will you do that?"

"Of course. Do all I can, though it's somewhat outa my line."

"You'll get paid for your trouble, o' course, and—— But get after it right away, won't ye? Get the lawyer. We gotta work some fast."

An hour later Jimps stared down at this, in neat typing, in the lawyer's hands:

Second: I give and bequeath my black stallion, registered under the name of Midnight Third, to my friend Tyler Jimps, sheriff of Caldera County, the best enemy I ever had.

"I don't know another man fit to own that horse," Cox explained, looking up with a feeble smile. "It's just a business proposition, Limpy. I want him left in good hands when I'm gone, and I'd trust 'im to no man I know but you."

The sunlight made misty the black Spanish eyes of Limpy Jimps, as he walked slowly out of the jail, for his eyes were wet.

"That's too much in one day," he muttered. "The two things in life I wanted most, handed me without me askin' for 'em. Janice and Midnight Third. The best girl and the best horse in all the world. I would like to know what more a man could ask of life. That's one way to get Jimps!"

He hurried away to tell Janice, with The Count of Monte Cristo trotting at his heels.

THE END.

SNAKE CAUGHT IN MOUSETRAP

A LITTLE while ago, Mrs. W. H. Mullins, of Camden, Arkansas, was disturbed by a commotion in her pantry where she had set a mousetrap a short time previously. She thought that this was due to the fact that some unwary mouse had been caught in the trap, but, on going to investigate, she found that her trap had caught a twenty-three-inch copperhead snake. It is believed that the reptile entered by a small hole near the water pipes and was wandering about looking for food when the trap caught him.

RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION ENLARGED

AN addition has recently been made to the agricultural range experiment station, maintained by the department of agriculture in Arizona. The amount of public land added to the reservation was 6,357 acres making a total of 48,692 acres, all situated in Pima County. The increase in the size of this range was for the purpose of facilitating the range investigations of the agriculture department through experiments of value to the stock industry of the region.

Tip, Lead Dog

by

Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Dude Duds," etc.

AFFECTIONATELY, Joe Hardy eyed his dog team. From Tip, the big leader, back to the wheelers, every Malemute was in perfect condition.

"For two cents," he mused, "I'd mush over to Cold Deck and see the sweepstakes."

The longer he considered the idea the better it sounded, until at last all of his will power struggled against the temptation. "I sure owe myself a vacation," he argued, as he adjusted the harness on Tip's shoulders. "Still, I sure have a lot of business to do, what with the railroad coming in to my coal claims and all." He straightened up. "On the other hand a man should play as well as work." Then he took his place at the gee pole. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" he quoted, "Cold Deck and the sweepstakes are tempting, but business is more important." Thereupon he mushed to the end of the tracks to pick up his mail.

The country was silent in the grasp of winter. Streams that brawled and eddied in summer were frozen solid. Man and animals could travel at will over marshes, lakes and streams. As Joe mushed, the invisible form of temptation glided ahead of him—a siren that lured him constantly and threatened to overcome even his stubborn streak.

The Cold Deck Sweepstakes was an annual event in the North, in which the best drivers and the teams in the country raced over a difficult course for prize money running into thousands of dollars, not to mention glory. It was a sporting proposition pure and simple, and more than one sour dough would have raced his team for the sheer satisfaction of winning. Gold in the shape of minted coins, nuggets, coarse grains, and fine dust changed hands, in amounts ranging from ounces to thousands of dollars.

Any sour dough who believed he had a team with a winning chance, and a lot who didn't, entered. Hundreds of others mushed in to see the finish and to back their opinions of dog flesh with the gold they had panned the previous summer. When temptation smiled upon Joe Hardy, she had tradition with her.

Nevertheless, grim old Joe did not weaken along the way. The train was just pulling in as he arrived, and the roadhouse keeper at the end of the tracks was bringing the baggage of two

strangers on a hand sled pulled by a single dog. At sight of Joe, he stopped and spoke briefly to the strangers.

One of them hurried over and smiled engagingly, "You are Joe Hardy, I believe. I have heard of you."

This last was obviously spoken in flattery, but it did not register with the sour dough. He waited for the next move.

"My name is Lunn and this is my business partner, Goss." He lifted his voice and hailed his partner. "Come over here, Jack, and meet one of the best scouts in the world, Joe Hardy."

Nor did this flattery register. Joe did not even blink his eyes while he waited for them to tip their hands. Even Tip seemed to view the pair in doubt. Joe shook hands with both Goss and Lunn and accepted their invitation to dine at the road house. "We planned to take that train out," Lunn explained, "until you came in sight, then the road house keeper suggested you might help us out. We are—er—capitalists seeking investments in mining property and are anxious to reach Cold Deck as soon as possible. We were misinformed evidently, for we were told to go to the end of the railroad where dog teams would take us over the mountains to the interior. Well, here we are—and no dog teams."

"There were two or three teams around here," Joe explained, "but they've gone to see the sweepstakes."

"It'll take us days to go back and then go in the other way," Lunn continued. "Let's get down to cases. How much do you want to take us there?"

"I'm not interested," Joe answered politely.

The fates seemed to be teaming up on him, forcing him to go whether he wanted to or not.

Lunn removed a roll of bills that made Joe's eyes bulge. "How much, Hardy?" A one hundred dollar bill floated down to the table—another, then a third, a fourth, and a fifth. There was a moment's hesitation then a sixth and seventh followed. Joe swallowed hard and pushed two bills back. He knew when he was whipped.

"Five hundred dollars is enough, I'm no holdup," he explained. "I'm going on one condition, though, and that is you fellows will have to travel on your own hind legs, as I propose to get there in time to see the excitement before and after the big doings."

The eagerness with which the men agreed might have aroused Joe's suspicions, but for the fact he was thinking of the event himself. "You can load your stuff onto the sled," he added, "I'll take care of the grub, sleeping bags, and stuff. We'll make a couple of road houses at night, but the rest of the time you'll have to sleep in the open. Are you in good shape?"

"Yes. We've sort of trained for this trip—lots of golf, long hikes down in the States. We believe in roughing it."

"Just so your legs are good enough to get you there—I'll do the rest and believe me, gents, we're going to travel." Now that Joe had convinced himself this was a business proposition, he was eager for it.

"Absolutely, I didn't yield to temptation," he muttered. "I was offered a good deal, and I accepted." But a still, small voice within said, "Don't kid yourself, Joe, you want to see the sweepstakes." To his mind came an old song, "Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin."

He swore under his breath and prepared for the trail.

Once under way Lunn and Goss became greatly interested in dogs. What kind of dogs could travel best under sweepstakes conditions. Which team would win? Did Joe know all the lead dogs? He did! What team would he bet on? The questions came throughout the day until finally Joe Hardy blew up. "If 'Flapjack' Meehan and 'Tubby' Willows enter their team of Malemutes my

money goes on them. If they don't, then I'm going to bet on young Paddy Sullivan and his Malemutes."

"Where does he live?"

"About a thousand miles from Cold Deck!"

"Must cost a lot of money to ship a dog team that far in this country."

"Paddy doesn't ship; he mushes and trains his team that way. We may get a line on him at the Boulder Creek Road House."

Goss whistled, and Lunn echoed his amazement. "A thousand miles on foot just to enter a sporting event?" he gasped out. "What sort of a bird is Sullivan?"

"One of the biggest sports in the North. Not only that—he has to mush another thousand miles to get back home. And that's not all, either. Paddy can lose with a grin and win in a way that won't hurt the other fellow's feelings."

They pulled into the Boulder Creek Road House the following afternoon. "Scotty" McDuff was on hand to greet them. Incidentally he delved into his poke and handed his partner a ten dollar gold piece.

"You made me lose ten dollars, Joe," he said as he shook Hardy's hand. "I bet, what with your business affairs and everything, you wouldn't mush to Cold Deck this year, and my pardner bet you would. It's just as well, though, for it'll be worth it. There's a surprise."

"Paddy Sullivan, of course!"

Goss and Lunn were all ears, though they pretended to ignore the conversation.

"Not Paddy Sullivan, though I am expecting him to-night, but the sweetest little lass you ever laid eyes on. She's been training a team for several years now. She started 'em as pups together, and I'm telling you, Joe, I've never seen a finer team in my life." He chuckled. "It'll sure hurt Paddy Sullivan's sense of sportsmanship when he learns he's driving against a girl. Paddy always was a bit tenderhearted where the fair sex is concerned. And yet, if he doesn't give his best, she'll more than likely box his ears; that's the sort she is."

"What's her name?"

"Molly Peck."

"You mean old 'Warhorse Charley' Peck's daughter?"

"The same!"

The evening meal was over with; pipes were lighted, and muscles were relaxing when a yell from without brought the group to the door. The light from the pressure gasoline lamp caused the frost on the arrival's parka to sparkle like thousands of diamonds. With a nervous gesture he threw the hood of his parka back, disclosing a jaw firm enough for comfort, even white teeth and a smile that hinted at the daring of its owner.

"Yours truly, Paddy Sullivan," he cried. "You can always tell when you are nearing Scotty's road house—there are no creatures around eating the refuse from his garbage dump. There's nothing on the dump but tin cans, and sometimes Scotty even saves the tin cans." He slapped Scott on the shoulder with sufficient force to make him grunt. "Eh, Scotty, old man?" he added.

"There are no wolves at Scotty McDuff's door, but the latch string is always on the outside whether a man has money or no," McDuff replied. "I won't offer to care for your team, Paddy, because I know that's a job you attend to yourself. What are your chances this year."

"I'm going to win!" Paddy's face became serious. "Flapjack will not enter his team, and I can't figure why—because it would be a great old race. He says it's been outside doing motion picture work and isn't fit, but I think he's telling a white lie. Put on a couple of moose steaks, Scotty; the inner man

has been crying for food these many hours."

With that he was gone.

The following day the two outfits took the trail together. Late that night they overtook another outfit camped by the trail. The light of admiration came into Paddy Sullivan's eyes, and another sort of light flashed from Goss' eyes, as the sole occupant emerged from the small tent a few moments after their shout.

Joe Hardy was the first to speak. "Molly Peck, grown up!" he cried. She shook hands man fashion. "I knew you when you were a red-faced little thing who slept like a top all day, and squawked to beat the deuce all night. This is Mr. Goss and Mr. Lunn."

The pair shook hands with the assurance of men who believed they knew and understood women. Each muttered the conventional words that mean nothing at all. She looked them squarely in the eyes, and only a keen observer would have noticed a brief expression of aversion come and go. Then Paddy Sullivan came up, all admiration—with a bit of the blarney that was a part of his nature. Eyes met; smiles passed, and it was Molly Peck who looked away. Evidently she found it provoking to be routed by this handsome knight of the trail, for almost defiantly she again faced him. Then it was Paddy Sullivan who flushed and looked away. In a manner suggesting a small boy offering an apple to his best girl, he kicked the snow with his moccasined foot and said, "Hear we are going to be rivals, Miss Peck."

"You have a wonderful team, Mr. Sullivan, but I have trained my dogs two years for this event without entering them. I think, perhaps I can beat you." She dropped her hand on his arm in an appealing little gesture, and her words indicated she had read what was in his chivalrous mind. "You will do your best to beat me, won't you?"

"I'll do my darnedest to beat you, Miss Peck, but I hope your team wins."

In the shadows Lunn and Goss exchanged glances. "It's Miss Peck and Mr. Sullivan now," Lunn whispered. "But it'll be Paddy and Molly when they reach Cold Deck, see if I'm not right. The two best teams entered in the Cold Deck Sweepstakes are owned by a pretty girl and a handsome man, each unmarried, that sure raises the devil with our plans."

"Oh, I don't know," Goss answered, "it may help us out. Say, what's that thing sticking up in the snow?" He pointed to a tripod made of poles that stood thirty feet above the ground.

"Search me!" Lunn replied. "Maybe it's a telephone pole."

Joe Hardy explained. "It's a sort of guide post, Mr. Lunn, and not a telegraph pole, though in this country wires are often strung on tripods. You see it can't blow over, and, being a tripod, it can't be mistaken for a tree. It has kept many an outfit on the trail when a blizzard was blowing. You'll find quite a number scattered between here and Cold Deck. You see this is the last leg of the Cold Deck Sweepstakes course."

Lunn saw; he saw a lot more than Joe Hardy ever dreamed.

The New Deal Café was crowded with men. Because of Flapjack Meehan's long record of honest and square shooting, he had been appointed stakeholder of the contest. Miners, who wished to bet on favorites, left their money with Flapjack—who promptly posted offers and accepted the money of those who wished to cover the money or dust offered.

Gradually the New Deal Café safe was crowded to a point where its steel sides threatened to bulge.

"This'll be the greatest event we've ever held," Flapjack informed Joe Hardy. "It's too bad you didn't enter your team with Tip, there's five thou-

sand dollars for the winner and twenty-five hundred in second money. Even third money, one thousand dollars, isn't a bad grubstake."

Joe Hardy eyed Flapjack narrowly. "Man to man, Flapjack, why didn't you enter."

Flapjack became serious. "Two months ago I dropped in to see old Warhorse Charley Peck. I saw a girl whose heart was set on more than winning a race with a team she had trained herself. I saw a man who has got to go outside for an operation. I don't know whether it is because we live on canned goods, or what, but a lot of the old-timers have to go outside for stomach repairs. Charley has to go and go quick or——"

"Die!" said Joe.

"Exactly! I offered to lend him the money because I wanted to win the sweepstakes this year. I know my team can do it; can beat any team here, for I know dogs."

Joe Hardy knew dogs also, and he knew Flapjack spoke the truth. For several moments the tall sour dough was silent, then he continued: "Charley always was independent; he declined my offer like a gentleman, and I'm sure they count on winning the prize money. Well, there was only one thing I could do and I did it. There'll be other Cold Deck Sweepstakes, and my team will be just as good next year."

At that moment Lunn motioned to Flapjack. They talked in low tones, and a considerable sum of money, in new bills from outside, vanished within Flapjack's safe.

"This race, Joe, has the boys from the creeks nearly crazy trying to pick a winner. It's a toss-up between Molly Peck's team and Paddy Sullivan's. Besides that Paddy and Molly have been together constantly except when working out their teams. Now they know Molly is square, and Paddy is square so there's no frame-up, but they're afraid Paddy's heart will affect the speed of his legs and perhaps unintentionally he'll let Molly win, and so," Flapjack's grin widened, "they are betting on Molly to win, ignoring the rest of the field and——" Here Flapjack laughed, "Then they begin to worry about their money."

"Why shouldn't Molly and Paddy spend a lot of time together?" Joe answered. "This is a sporting event, isn't it? What do they want them to do, make faces at each other like a couple of prize fighters."

Again Flapjack was interrupted. This time Mr. Goss parted with a large roll of bills. Flapjack was serious when he returned to Joe. "Who are those birds you brought in from the railroad, Joe? They claim they are mining men, but they don't know a thing about mining. They are too clever to invest money in something they know nothing about, but they are investing money and a lot of it."

"What in?"

"In the sweepstakes. They are covering every dollar offered that Molly will win. That means they think she'll lose. Joe, we've got to watch 'em. They've sunk twenty thousand dollars in this so far, and it wouldn't be the first time a couple of slickers from the outside tried to clean up, by crooked work, a lot of Alaskan dust."

Three days before the long grind over the country surrounding Cold Deck, the excitement had reached the breaking piont. The camp was packed with men in from the surrounding country. Incidental sports were under way. There were prizes up for short races; cocktails preceding the banquet to come. On a hill back of the town a ski jump had been constructed, and the frozen river that ran through the camp offered fair ice skating.

With hawklike eyes, Lunn and Goss observed all details. They were every-

where, carrying out their rôle of mining men, seeking investments. Miners smoked their good cigars and told them glowing tales of property needing development. Yet underneath the outward show of confidence and good fellowship, Flapjack and Joe Hardy detected in them a tenseness. Joe was expecting almost anything to happen; yet when the pair made their first move, it was not noticed until too late.

Lunn slipped a ten dollar bill to the man of all work at the hotel. "Get me a good pair of ice skates," he directed, "rent 'em for a week, I want to get in on this."

Lunn could skate! A great ring gathered about on the ice and watched him. In beautiful script he wrote, "Lunn & Goss, Mining Engineers." He placed a period by spinning around on the point of his skate, then leaped backwards, apparently so that no other mark remained on the ice but the script writing. To the surprise of every one he slipped, skidded feet first into the crowd. From Molly Peck came an outcry of pain, and only Paddy's strong arm prevented her from being knocked down as Lunn's skate struck her left foot.

He was up instantly, bowing. "I'm sorry, Miss Peck; I hope you are not injured. I had every reason to believe I could keep my feet. I am so sorry."

"It is quite all right," she answered through set lips. Paddy Sullivan was glowering, not that he suspected a trick, but people had no business hurting Molly Peck. "It is all right," she repeated as Lunn renewed his apology.

But it wasn't quite all right. The ankle was not broken, nor sprained, but it was in no condition to carry her through the hard course to victory. She realized it even before the doctor rendered his decision. She was very quiet as she listened; she even smiled as the group left her room at the hotel. Lunn was the last to leave, still expressing regrets, then he hurried to his own room on the floor above.

"The jane's out," he said. "Now, unless the miners squawk because she's not driving, and Meehan calls off the bet, we'll be sitting pretty. I managed it neatly, too."

When the others had disappeared Paddy Sullivan sneaked back to Molly's room and pressed his ear against the door, then he stooped and peered through the keyhole. He justified his course in his own mind, and that was sufficient for Paddy. He could see her sitting on the edge of the bed with both hands clenched tight, and the tears streaming down her face. "Poor old dad," she whispered hoarsely, "I'm out of it!"

Paddy swore, then knocked. "Molly, I'm coming in!" he announced. Before she could object, he was in the room, and the door closed behind him. Right there he showed her who was boss. He slipped his arm about her waist and snuggled her up close. "It's tough, Molly," he said gently, "mighty tough, but don't worry. Your team is going to romp home to victory."

"Paddy, there isn't a driver at Cold Deck that I'd trust them to who isn't already engaged."

"I've got a driver for you. He knows your team, too. He knows you, and he's in this sweepstakes affair for sport and not for prize money. His name is Paddy Sullivan, and he's going to drive your Malemutes."

"Oh, Paddy! That is wonderful, but I won't let you. You've got to drive your own team."

"The funny thing about this affair is that you haven't a thing to say about it, Molly. Not a thing. And listen, you know what I think? Well, I think Lunn's hitting you wasn't an accident. There were a lot of other ankles he could have hit besides one belonging to the driver of the team he's betting against. I'm going to see Flapjack Mee-

hand right now. Somebody may get scared and want bets called off."

Paddy Sullivan made a big mistake in not listening at the door as he left, or he would have heard her whisper softly, "Paddy Sullivan, I could love you for that alone, if I didn't love you already; but I'll never tell you. Half the girls in the North have fallen for you; but you—— Ah, Paddy, you like them, but you never love them."

A half dozen miners were in the New Deal Café when Paddy entered. Flapjack was speaking. "I'll call the managers together, gentlemen," he announced, "and, if they say the word, all bets on Molly Peck's team will be called off because she's not driving."

Paddy Sullivan stood on a chair. "If it'll make any difference, gents," he announced, "I'm going to drive Molly Peck's team."

He apparently watched them as he spoke, but out of the corner of his eye he was studying Goss. The gambler's muscles must have jerked involuntarily. Paddy felt a warm glow of satisfaction stealing over his body. He felt even warmer when a heavy bettor turned to Flapjack. "Let my bet ride," he said.

Goss was too clever to leave immediately, but he suffered great mental anguish while he delayed. Once in his room with Lunn he exploded. "That fool Irishman is going to drive the girl's team. They were trying to call bets off, but his offer to drive changed all that." Goss paced to and fro nervously. "Close to twenty-five thousand we have up. I'm a nervous wreck."

"Well, that fool Irishman won't win, depend on that! I've hired a dog team from an Indian three miles out of town, and I'm going to use it when the time comes—if it snows. You remember those tripods back there? Well!"

"And what else? I'm furnishing most of the money in exchange for your idea, Lunn, don't forget that. I can't!"

"Neither can I. You won't let me. But we'll walk out of this camp with our own money and around twenty-five thousand dollars of dust and miner's cash."

The guard watching Molly Peck's dog team accepted one of Lunn's cigars and consented to his taking a photograph of Denny, Molly's lead dog. There certainly could be no harm in that. Lunn held a high speed camera in both hands and peered down through the hood, watching the guard's every mood. "That's it, keep Denny right there and drive the other dogs back." For a brief instant, the guard's back was turned. A tiny ball of meat flashed from Lunn's hand. Denny caught it in mid-aid and gulped it down. The camera clicked. "Thanks!" said Lunn and he spoke right from the heart.

The day of the start found Joe Hardy whispering words of sympathy to his own lead dog, Tip. "It's sure rough, old boy, that you can't go. You know it's in the air, don't you. Well, we'll go next year, eh, boy?"

The light footfall of a moccasined foot caught Joe's ear and he turned. Paddy Sullivan was regarding him seriously. "How much do you want for Tip?" he inquired.

"A million dollars, Paddy, and even then, I'd hesitate! Why?"

"Will you sell him to Molly Peck for a dollar. I want him in the team. She'll sell him back to you. Joe, we're up against some clever men. I don't know how it was done, because I have had a guard over Molly's team day and night, but Denny is not right this morning. You know the rules. Every dog that starts out must be brought back, even if dead. It's a humane rule, in keeping with Alaska's idea of treatment of dogs. If Denny comes in on the sled I'm going to need Tip's skill, strength, leadership and brains to win this race."

"Why not sell Molly your own leader?"

" 'Rough' Rhodes, the mail carrier, is going to drive my team. He's doing it for sportsmanship, and I can't rob him of the leader."

"And you are racing against your own dogs, Paddy?"

"It looks like it!"

"Then if you can do that, Paddy, I can spare Tip. I'll have a bill of sale fixed up right away. Take him along with you."

There were lumps in a number of throats when the dogs lined up. Tip, miserable in second place instead of leading, brought a lump to Joe's throat; Paddy Sullivan, seeing his own team, sighed, for after all he loved his dogs. And there was Molly watching the team she had spent so much time bringing up to this great day, only to watch them driven by another—even if that other was Paddy Sullivan.

The dogs, attached to light racing sleds made of hickory, lashed with reindeer sinew or walrus hide, were ready, eager. There were furs and water boots for the men, flannel moccasins for the dogs' feet; even veils to protect their eyes should the sun prove too strong.

A cheer that reached the very mountains came as the first team got under way; last minute wagers were made; the last team passed from view, and Cold Deck settled down to wait. News would trickle back by telegraph at times. Then there would be long waits when no news could reach them. Luck would enter, also, for a blizzard might strike some and miss others.

Joe Hardy gave Molly a fatherly pat on the shoulder as they walked away. "It's tough not to be driving them, Molly, but next year you can drive the pick of the Peck and Sullivan teams, eh?" He watched a lovely flush move across her face, already beautiful from the cold air and her bountiful health. She shook her head. "Paddy Sullivan is loved but never loves," she answered. "Next year I'd like to beat him, because I think he'd like it."

Just ahead of them walked Goss and Lunn, talking about the fine weather Cold Deck was having, inwardly tense. "That strange dog in the girl's team looked a lot like Joe Hardy's Tip," Goss said frequently. "We may have to stop 'em on the trail."

"Game!"

The word came again and again from Paddy Sullivan's lips, as he watched Denny's struggle to retain his place at the head of the team. The man sensed there was something hurting the dog within, yet his fierce spirit was driving him onward. Bit by bit they were losing, yet Paddy did not have the courage to break the dog's heart by taking him out.

They were the last in the first night, and that night he slept with his dogs to note the condition of each. Each dog came in for some attention. The telegraph had clicked back the progress, and hearts in Cold Deck were heavy when the bulletin always read: "Sullivan trailing."

A team vanished over the ridge noon of the second day, the last but Sullivan's. He stopped. "Denny, lad, I hate to do it, but you've got to ride. There's something inside of you working that's stronger than your spirit."

He wrapped the dog in furs, lashed him to the sled and spoke to Joe Hardy's Tip. As a wounded man responds when blood is transfused into his veins, so did Molly Peck's team respond to Tip's powerful leadership. Their pace had been easy thus far, so now Paddy forced them.

That night just one team camped ahead of him. The bulletin at Cold Deck read:

Rhodes driving Sullivan's team continues to lead. Sullivan driving Peck team passed Moose Gulch road house second with leader riding.

A yell came from Joe Hardy. "Tip's leading! Tip's leading. Now watch those sled runners smoke. I'll bet the old boy is happy. Anybody got five hundred dollars that says Sullivan won't arrive first."

Lunn stepped forward. "As a sporting proposition, sir, I'll take the bet!"

The night dragged. Each sour dough knew what was taking place at the different camps. Exhausted men were working over tired dogs, preparing for the final mad dash of the morrow. The weather, too, had changed. From somewhere leaped a cold blast that picked up the snow and whirled it about until it had gathered force; then it drove the ice particles straight southward from whence the teams must now come.

Denny's condition continued to worry Paddy Sullivan as he hit the trail the next day. Hour after hour he looked down upon the covered figure that was a burden to his team mates. "It's poison," he muttered, "some slow-working stuff." His teeth set, and he relieved his feelings somewhat by going down a steep slope at top speed.

Far ahead he saw a team and beyond that the approaching storm. Bit by bit, he overhauled the other. It was his own magnificent team that he was approaching. He saw Rough Rhodes look back and urge them to greater speed. Every ounce of strength of man and dog went into the struggle. It thrilled him deeply to see his dogs respond, yet bit by bit he passed them. There was a deep-seated feeling that had he been guiding his own team, nothing in the North would pass them.

The next road house keeper telephoned a message that drove Cold Deck wild. He roared so loudly into the telephone that all Flapjack Meehan got was squawks and rattles. "Sullivan and Rhodes just passed, neck and neck; dogs and men seemed crazy with excitement. Wait until I look. Hey! Sullivan is leading. Wait a minute. Still leading. The storm has just reached here. I don't know where the others are."

At Cold Deck, two men heard the news and silently disappeared. Four miles out of town, they stopped. With much tugging they moved several tripods. Here the men followed the tripods closely, for the valley parted. One led to Cold Deck, the other to remoteness. As they toiled tiny particles filled the scars left in the snow and wiped out all trace of their treachery.

"You get back to town, Goss, one of us should be pretty much in evidence. I'm going up a mile to take a look."

Goss nodded. He turned the team back, while Lunn went on alone.

A half hour later he heard above the roar of the storm the cry of a man encouraging a dog team. Again and again he called them by name; praising, never criticising. The storm lifted, and then he saw them, moving slowly, storm-battered. Tip was in the lead; the sled was shrouded. Tip's eyes almost blinded from the particles; his nostrils were closed, but presently he snorted, then sniffed. Abruptly he turned his head, as he caught a scent he recognized. Then he swerved slightly to investigate.

"Tip! Gee! Gee! Tip!" As Sullivan spoke he caught sight of the other, when, but for Tip's interest, he would have passed him by. It looked suspicious to Paddy, this concealment in a storm. He stopped, then recognized Lunn. There, alone a challenge was given and accepted. Lunn's automatic lifted. "Back up, Sullivan!"

Sullivan saw the automatic; he saw more than that. He saw the broken heart of Denny deprived of leadership; he saw the working of the poison which, though it did not kill, nevertheless hurt. Then he forgot caution. Lunn's pistol cracked an instant before Paddy reached him. It cracked again as they grappled. Blood streamed down Paddy's chest, yet his great muscles responded to his

will. Again and again his fist drove into the hateful face before him; his feet stamped Lunn's weapon into the snow; fists met fists, then body met body.

Presently Paddy stood up, a drunken, wounded giant in torn parka and battered hands. With each throb of his pulse he could feel his life's blood leave him.

"Tip!" he muttered. "Tip!" The ice particles were stinging his face as if by combined efforts to bring him down. "Tip, come boy!" He stumbled down the trail and onto the sled. Tip had waited as Joe Hardy had taught him to wait when no guiding hand was at the gee pole. "Mush, Tip!"

Only a refusal to be beaten kept Sullivan on his feet, but presently the strength was weaker than the spirit. Paddy climbed to the sled and as one in a trance saw the tripods loom up. "We may make it yet," he muttered, "if Rhodes doesn't come too fast. We may —— Gee, Tip, gee!"

The dog was not following the tripods, but taking the other course. It led into a valley that was cold and remote, where no man lived to lend a helping hand. It led to defeat and death. Twice he turned the dog toward the tripods, but the third time he fell. Tip circled back and waited; Paddy Sullivan crawled on, and the runners beneath screamed over the snow. Unconsciousness came, then consciousness. Millions of ice particles darted about. He could not see Tip, but he knew he was somewhere ahead, going, going, going; deeper into the valley of remoteness, for he had ignored the tripods. A dullness stole over him; the lurching sled seemed far away; his body seemed to soar through space.

Far away he heard bells ringing; the cheers of maddened people; screaming whistles. He knew men were hugging dogs in their delight; he knew the winner had crossed the finish line. "My team won," he muttered, "Rough Rhodes drove 'em to victory. Only Tip took the wrong trail into the valley of—death. This must be death; this madness; down in Cold Deck the winner surely——"

"Tip! Boy, you won. Won even if old Joe didn't drive you." It was Joe Hardy's voice. Well, if this were death, then Joe was in Heaven, too. Paddy Sullivan opened his eyes and looked at the sea of faces above him; then he found the one he sought. A pair of arms slipped about his neck, and a voice filled with love and dread told him some things she would never have mentioned to Paddy Sullivan, alive, well, and standing on his hind legs.

She said it with all the people listening, too, because she was afraid Paddy might die; the doctor looked serious. Paddy said something right back with all the tenderness an Irishman in love can put into his words.

The door opened and Rough Rhodes came into the room with several thousand snowflakes. He deposited a burden; also he relieved his mind. "Who in thunder shifted those tripods. If I hadn't crossed Old Tip's trail I'd have been going yet. Found Lunn up there almost covered in the snow. Somebody sure has been working on the cuss. Hello, Paddy! What happened!" Rough Rhodes had suddenly become tender. He jerked the doctor aside. "He isn't going to die, is he?"

"With tender nursing, he'll pull through," the physician said pointedly, "and it looks to me as if he'd get plenty of it the way Molly Peck is babying him."

Hokey-pokey

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "What Shorty Did," etc.

THE Monte Vista Rodeo committee decided to inject a little novelty into their program and put on a broncho-busting contest solely for the Apache braves from the Que-Na-Bel Indian Reservation, down in San Juan County. The committee had cut itself a larger piece of cake than it could comfortably handle, it soon discovered.

While the committee had expected about a dozen of the more intrepid 'Paches to enter the busting event, it was not prepared for the rush of Indian riders that responded—some sixty of them. It threw up its hands in despair when it tried to figure out a way of handling the horde of red bronc busters who had responded to its invitation.

"Waal," said Sheriff Joe Cook, at the last meeting of the committee just before the great day, "thar's only one thing to do—in my estimation. That's to save time an' heaps o' trouble by havin' the whole dog-gone bunch do their bustin' at one an' the same time. Start 'em all out together, an' may the best Injun win."

"Sheriff," spoke up "Red" Feeney, chairman of the committee, "yuh have done yuhrself proud with that suggestion; she listens good to me, brother, an' I'm fer it. I kin just see them sixty Que-Na-Bel braves a-hoppin' to it, all to once, an' red skyrockets fillin' the air as the broncs git in their licks. Why, boys, it'll be better'n the wild hoss race fer concentrated action an' multiplied thrills!"

"Sure enough," put in Floyd Penny, of the committee, "we'll have them Injun riders all congregate in the arena, with their helpers, an' then we kin deliver the outlaws to 'em, same as we do in the wild hosse race. When we say go, they'll start saddlin', an' then all the judges has to do is to set back an' see who makes the best ride. That'll be easier than watchin' sixty Injuns ridin' single fer a couple o' hours, an' tryin' to decide who rid best."

"Thar's only one thing," said Red

Feeney, "we gotta try to be fair. We gotta see that no Injun takes an advantage o' any kind—an' the best man has to be declared the winner, o' course!"

"O' course," agreed the sheriff heartily, "that's right. We kin appoint some bird as understands them Injuns to act as sort o' ringmaster fer the massacre. He kin be responsible fer the arena an' the start, an' see that all is square and on the level!"

The committee nodded in agreement.

"As fer that man," went on Sheriff Cook quietly, "I think I kin easily nominate him. What say we appoint my deputy, 'Shorty' McKay, who understands 'Paches, fer the job o' ringmaster?"

"Nominations is closed!" spoke up Feeney.

"Shorty's elected unanimously," cried Floyd Penny.

When Shorty heard the news he went out and threw rocks at the hitching post until he cooled off. Then he went back into the sheriff's office and protested some more. Sheriff Cook was adamant. He turned a deaf ear to Shorty's wails. He waited until Shorty was out of breath, and then he took up the conversation.

"Howl yuhr head off, an' yuh'll still be master o' Injuns fer this rodeo!" said the sheriff determinedly. "Yuh're the logical man. Yuh got a smatterin' o' 'Pache lingo, as yuh, yuhrself, has often boasted, out o' yuhr turn. An' I mean to put that to some account right now! Yuh ain't half appreciatin' the honor that has been paid yuh by the rodeo committee!"

"Honor?"

"Yes, honor! The committee is trustin' yuh to see that this Injun buckin' contest is on the dead level. Yuh'll see that no Injun takes an advantage. Yuh'll see that no saddlin' starts until the committee says go, an' that no acids or cactus leaves is put beneath saddles to make the nags buck harder. Yuh'll see that thar's no leather pullin', or foulin' or dirty work."

"Has yuh ever heard, boss," asked Shorty, "o' a bug like a centipede, which, instead o' havin' a hundred laigs, has a hundred eyes?"

"No," said the sheriff, "I never did, but what has that got to do with this matter?"

"Nuthin'," said Shorty, "except I'll have to be one o' them bugs, as nobody has ever heard of, ef I'm goin' to watch sixty Injuns tryin' to stick to sixty broncs, all to one time, and see that everything is on the level, as yuh say."

The sheriff reached quickly for an inkstand, but Shorty, snatching up his hat, fled out of the office.

When the Apaches began to drift in from the Que-Na-Bel Reservation, the day before the rodeo, Shorty dutifully took charge of them, and with difficulty succeeded in explaining to them the finer details of the big contest the next day. The idea of seeing the Apaches in the busting contest had gone over big with the rodeo crowds, who relished something new. The Apaches, themselves, were eager, especially so since the first prize was a fine two-hundred-dollar saddle that any brave would be proud to sport on the reservation. The committee, having turned over all details of the Indian contest—and all the attending grief—to Shorty, sat back and grinned happily.

However, on the day of the rodeo, Sheriff Cook sought out his deputy and made what the Indians called "thunder talk" to him in no uncertain language. The sheriff was mad as a hornet.

"Hey yuh!" he cried, by way of greeting Shorty. "Yuh seen fit, Shorty, to excusin' yuhrself from attendin' to all work around the office fer three days now, on the alibi that yuh was all tied up out here with these 'Paches—huh! Now I'm askin' what yuh've been doin' to keep yuh so busy? Yuh was put out

here to see that everything went straight and level and here I hears from Eddie Owens, the druggist, that an Injun was in this mawnin' an' bought a bottle o' hokey-pokey!"

"Sure enough?" cried Shorty. "Who was he?"

"Who was he?" exclaimed the sheriff, "how in heck should I know that? That's yuhr business to find out, I'd say!"

"Doesn't Eddie know who he was?"

"All Injuns look alike to Eddie—an' to me," said the sheriff, "an' naturally the bird didn't say who he was, seein' he was buyin' outlaw stuff to rub on some hoss to make him buck harder, in violation o' rules an' honesty."

Shorty shrugged. "An' Eddie sold the stuff to him?"

"Yes—he did; he hesitated, he says, at fust, but when the Injun pulled a big knife an' wet a finger an' tried the edge o' it, Eddie got right smart busy an' sold him the hokey-pokey!"

"Sure enough!"

"Yes—sure enough! An' I come to tell yuh so that yuh can git started and find out who that Injun was. We ain't standin' fer no crooked work in this contest, an' yuh was appointed an' will be held responsible."

"Without my consent," snapped out Shorty.

"Waal," said the sheriff meaningly, "yuh are responsible, just the same. Yuh better get busy on that hokey-pokey matter right now if yuh know what side yuhr bread is buttered on!"

After the sheriff had departed, in wrath, Shorty sat down, cross-legged, in the shade of a corral, and sympathized with himself for all of half an hour. He was in a fine fix. He didn't doubt but that some, or at least one, of the Indians might be planning to take undue advantage. He knew that the Apaches knew that a little hokey-pokey—that acid that bites into the toughest mustang and makes him jump—would aid the brave who used it toward making a ride for the money. There was no doubt that some unscrupulous one of them would try it. Yet how was he to single that man out, beforehand, or even see him, in the act of applying it at the moment of saddling, since there were to be sixty in the arena, any one of whom might be the guilty red?

"I'm lost," said Shorty bitterly, "but I reckon I better meander in an' see Owens an' find out what this crooked hombre looked like. anyhow."

Owens only remembered that he was an Indian. "He had a whale o' a knife, though," said Owens, shuddering. "He just made me sell him that stuff, Shorty!"

"How much did yuh give him?"

"Four ounces!"

"Give me two or three o' the same kind o' bottles as yuh gave him," said Shorty judiciously, "and make it fast!"

"What'll yuh have in 'em?"

Shorty told him, quickly, and Owens, shaking his head, put up the prescriptions Shorty had ordered. Shorty, as soon as he had emerged from the drug store, emptied all of the four ounce bottles but one. He filled them up with water and, whistling to himself, proceeded back to the arena, where the early comers in the crowd were already assembling, although the rodeo was still two hours off. The Apaches were just having dinner, in their tepee camp outside of the rodeo grounds.

"Waal," asked Sheriff Cook, as the rodeo got well under way at two o'clock, "didja find that crooked 'Pache yet?"

"No," said Shorty, "but I'll watch fer him close—an' anyhow I'm gonna give them Injuns all a good harangue on honesty afore the 'Pache bucking contest starts!"

"Honesty?" cried the sheriff, and then he suddenly doubled up in mirth and shook in convusions, but before he

left he managed to gasp a few coherent words.

"Yuh'd better do more than talk honesty to them—yuh better see that thar is honesty in that contest!"

One by one, the events of the program were run off, with the crowds applauding each offering. It seemed as if most of the enthusiasm was being saved for the novelty event of the day—the Apache broncho-busting contest.

When the last of the steer ropers had finished, in the arena, and only a couple of track races remained before the grand Apache event, Shorty sent out a clarion call for all the Indians. His yells, supplanted by runners, corralled the whole bunch of sixty inside of a few minutes.

As they arrived, in all their gaudy finery, Shorty motioned to them to line up, side by side, in front of him. When the sixty were so arranged—young bucks, old braves, big fellows, little fellows—Shorty stepped back a few paces, where he could see the whole line with ease, and began his talk.

"Look here," he began, in Apache; "some one of yuh birds lost this little bottle. I found it near your camp—and I want to give it back to the man who lost it, for I guess it is good medicine. Mebbe it is tequila, who knows. Now yuh, who lost this little bottle, step out here and get it back!"

Shorty held up the little bottle—one of those Owens had given him—and watched the Indian line eagerly. Of course, no Indian stepped forward, which was just as Shorty had expected. He pocketed the bottle with a grim smile. Then he shook a fist at the Apaches.

"No—yuh will not claim that bottle," he said, almost imitating the tones of the sheriff when he "thunder talked," as the Apaches called it. "I didn't expect any one would. It is hokey-pokey—and it is not allowed in this contest. The great spirit o' justice says it ain't—an' the great spirit o' justice knows what he is talkin' about. I have this to tell yuh, brothers—the great spirit o' justice will make the man very sorry who dares to use hokey-pokey in this ride. The spirit o' justice will make him feel very bad, will—er—make him weep for his unworthiness—remember that!"

The Indians uttered exclamations.

"All right," said Shorty, dismissing them with a wave of his hand, "that's that. Now get ready for the ridin'. It's the next thing on the program—get movin'!"

They did. At almost the same instant the rodeo committee, including Sheriff Joe Cook, moved out into the arena to supervise the big novelty event. As they reached Shorty, who stood glumly in the middle of the arena, the sheriff buzzed him again on the matter of the hokey-pokey. Shorty assured him, in return, that he had sure enough explained matters to the Apaches, and that there was no question but that the contest would be eminently fair and on the level. Then Shorty turned to the committee and told them what he had told the Indians.

"I told them that if any one of them used hokey-pokey to take unfair advantage," said Shorty, "the great spirit o' justice would make the guilty man weep!"

"Huh!" said the committee.

"Yuh watch!" said Shorty tersely.

The committee had wisely appointed a number of extra field judges. These now assembled, and the word was given to the wranglers to bring in the outlaw horses. The Apache contestants, racing to the fence, quickly stripped of blankets, and came dashing back in their moccasins, chaps and bright-colored shirts. A few of them wore hats. A few wore a jaunty feather, but many had their black hair slicked down without other headdress. They waited, to

the applause of the big crowd, while the wranglers brought in the bronchos —mean, wiry horses from the ranges— each on the end of a rope. The outlaw and rope was delivered to the Indian riders, each of whom had two helpers to aid him in saddling and mounting.

There was confusion from the very start. The broncs pivoted, whirled, and struck out with avenging hoofs. The Indians, tugging on the ropes, awaited the signal that would start them saddling. When every Apache rider had a horse, the committee signaled to the announcer. He leaned out of his crow's nest in the judges' stand and yelped the word to go.

Instantly bedlam broke loose in that arena, where one hundred and eighty Indians, all wild with excitement, endeavored to saddle quickly sixty mean horses. Here and there a horse broke away and dashed through the mêlée, bowling Apaches right and left. The committee itself, hardened as it was to excitement, could not help but thrill at the sight, the greatest event old Monte had ever staged in any rodeo.

As for Shorty, he had been watching something of great interest to his immediate left. He stalked away now, fumbling in his pocket as he went. He hurried through the mass of struggling Indians and straining horses and walked rapidly to where Spotted Snake, one of the better-known braves, was fighting, with his two companions, to get a saddle on a little gray outlaw. Shorty paused and watched and finally grunted in satisfaction. Then he approached, withdrew his hand from his pocket, and clapped it suddenly on Spotted Snake's shoulder. The Indian whirled around in surprise to stare into Shorty's face.

"Hope yuh make a good ride, Snake," was all that Shorty said. "Gee, that's a purty necktie yuh got on!"

Shorty reached for the tie, fingering it; then he turned and walked away, leaving Spotted Snake staring.

The next instant Young Beaver, with a wild yell, had leaped into the saddle on his outlaw and had started off, to the acclaim of the grand stands. That electrified Spotted Snake and the other braves. Cinches were hastily yanked tight—or halfway so—and while the helpers tumbled in all directions and fled for the shelter of the fences the Apache riders mounted almost as a man, almost like a troop of well-trained cavalry, and started off, bumpity-bump, thudity-thud, across, around, and through the arena, in all directions.

Bedlam broke loose as this rider and that was tossed for a goal by the worse broncs. Cheers echoed as other Indian riders, still clinging to the backs of maddened animals, managed to weather the first terrible storm and stick for the second stanza. As the outlaws unseated their riders, one by one, and dashed out of the maelstrom, the task of the judges became easier. Now only a few riders were still up, and most of these were making splendid rides; among these was Spotted Snake, Shorty noticed, although he was rubbing his face and seemingly paying more attention to himself and his troubles than to his horse.

By the rules of the contest, made for the accommodations of the judges, the ride was to last until the horses had been thoroughly conquered. In the ten minutes it took to do this, to the wild delight of the crowd, only eight riders had suceeded in remaining on their mounts. Of these eight, the first man up, Young Beaver, and Spotted Snake, it appeared, had made the best rides. They had shown the best form, and, by luck, had drawn outlaws that gave both trained riders the chance to make grand stand rides for the prize. Young Beaver, fat and chunky as the aquatic animal he was named after, had been cruelly bounced up and down and around the arena by the bay outlaw that he had drawn. He had stuck, riding

straight up in his saddle, and he got a mighty big hand as he had flashed past the arena on several occasions. The other Apaches were merely riding doggedly; Young Beaver was making an artistic job out of his task.

"Young Beaver," cried several of the judges, "he sure is popular with the crowd—an' he's riding fine!"

"Fine—fer an Injun!" admitted Sheriff Joe Cook. "But looky yonder at that Spotted Snake on the gray hoss!"

Spotted Snake, on the mean little gray broncho that he had drawn, was surely riding, but he was going through some peculiar antics all the while, which, unexplained as they were, nevertheless emphasized the fact that the Indian could think of—and do—other things while weathering the rough sea on a tough horse. Spotted Snake seemed to be very busy brushing his hair back out of his eyes, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and trying to rub some dust out of his face or something. But Young Beaver and he, in the opinion of the judges, were both conquering outlaw horses that, true to the traditions of the range, were giving them ample opportunity of showing all their skill in the saddle. The judges, noting this, signaled to the starter, who fired a revolver, marking the end of the ride. The eight who had weathered the fight hastened to leap from the tired broncs.

"All yuh birds who stuck to the last," shouted Shorty in Apache, "come up here to the committee an' judges, an' the winner will be announced then! Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

Young Beaver, Lone Feather, Spotted Snake, Yellow Bird, and four others ran for the judges.

"Line up," cried Shorty. As they did so, Shorty pointed an accusing finger at Spotted Snake, who hung his head.

"Spotted Snake," cried Shorty loudly, "yuh weep! Tears roll from yuhr eyes; it is as I said—the spirit o' justice has touched yuh. Yuh weep; yuh were unfair."

The other Apaches stared at Spotted Snake to see that Shorty's charge was true. Spotted Snake's eyes were red and watery, and tears ran down his cheeks.

The committee, partially understanding, gasped.

"Spotted Snake," cried Shorty dramatically, "yuh were unfair! Yuh used hokey-pokey on yuhr hoss."

The Indian spread out his hands in despair.

"*Si,* señor," he acknowledged, as the tears still ran from his downcast eyes, "it is so. The spirit that you told us of has acted. I weep—for my many sins."

The judges, hearing and generally understanding Spotted Snake's amazing confession, lost no time in deciding that, since Spotted Snake had disqualified himself by his admitted use of the hokey-pokey, Young Beaver had won the Apache bucking-contest prize. They told him so—and then the crowd. A wild burst of applause went up. Young Beaver grinned from ear to ear and ran off, toward the grand stand, to claim his prize from the trophy rack in front of the stand, where he got another ovation.

The committee watched Spotted Snake slink away.

"Waal," said Red Feeney, wiping his brow with a handkerchief, "ef that wasn't the most remarkable thing I ever seen I'll eat my hat. Shorty, yuh had that ol' boy, Spotted Snake, so believin' that tale o' the spirit o' justice makin' him weep that he actually gave himself away, admittin' he used hokey-pokey."

"Hokey-pokey," spoke up Sheriff Cook, stroking his chin. "By golly, it all looked like hocus-pocus to me."

"Correct, yuh are, boss," said Shorty, and he smiled grimly at the committee.

"That talk about the spirit o' justice was hocus-pocus, but Spotted Snake didn't know it! I got Eddie Owens, the druggist, to give me several bottles like the one he sold the unknown Injun. I had him put oil o' mustard in one of 'em. When I called the 'Paches and held up the bottle I claimed to have found I knew no one would claim it, but I hoped some one would give himself away by reaching for his own bottle ef he had purchased it from Eddie. I saw Spotted Snake reach for his shirt pocket, so I suspected him right off.

"Then, when the contest started, I watched Spotted Snake. I saw him rub something on his hoss, just afore he plopped the saddle down on it. I could never prove it was hokey-pokey, an' I didn't like to try to do that when I had no other witnesses—so I goes up and clasps Spotted Snake on the shoulder, bein' careful to spill some o' my oil o' mustard out of my bottle, on his shirt. Then I touches his necktie the same way—gettin' some oil o' mustard thar. An' oil o' mustard would make a wooden Injun weep! Spotted Snake cried and didn't know why, an' figgerin' it must be, as I said, the spirit o' justice, he confessed!"

Sheriff Joe Cook bowed grandly to the astonished committee as Shorty finished his explanation. "Whether it's hokey-pokey or hocus-pocus," he said proudly, "yuh gotta hand it to my deputy, Shorty McKay. He's right on the job in either case! Gents, I proposes three cheers fer Shorty McKay, *my* deputy!"

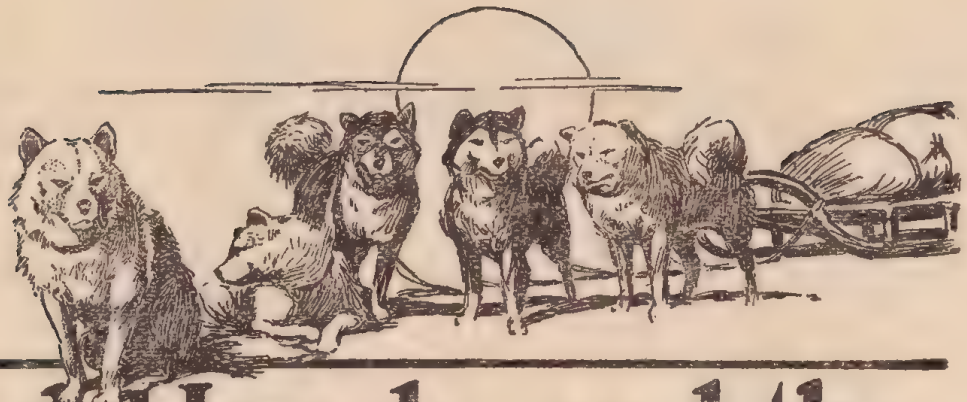
The grand stand, hearing the howls, thought that the rodeo committee was just waking up and was giving Young Beaver a belated acknowledgment.

PETRIFIED FOREST SPECIMENS FOR TOURISTS

WHILE it is strictly forbidden to remove specimens from Arizona's famous Petrified Forest, this restriction applies only within the actual limits of the government reserve. There are other places close to the reserve where petrified trees are to be found and specimens of these may be taken by tourists without violating the law. Official signs in the forest proper direct travelers to a point outside where it is permissible to take pieces of the petrified trees.

ARIZONA'S TAXABLE BUFFALO

THERE is only one buffalo herd in Arizona that is subject to taxation. This is the famous Buffalo Jones herd, which was brought from Texas in the early nineties. Eighty head of buffalo comprise the herd, which makes its home in a secluded spot in Conconino County, known as House Rock Valley, near the Colorado River, in the vicinity of Lee's Ferry. The animals are valued for taxation purposes at fifteen dollars a head, the same as range cattle.



Red Heads and the Parlor Kind

by Herbert Farris

Author of "Roll Out—or Roll Up," etc.

ON his knees in front of a sheet iron stove, Ford Barclay was trying to light a fire. The abandoned cabin, upon which he had stumbled, had an abundance of dry spruce. He had found a small pile of kindling, yet Barclay was unable to get a fire going. His matches, carried loose in his pocket, were damp, and as he drew them with trembling, half-frozen fingers across the surface of the rusty stove, the heads gave way like so much putty. Discouraged at last, he opened the cabin door and dragged his Yukon sled into the room. He worked frantically, but his numbed fingers could not unfasten the frozen lash rope which bound the canvas-covered, meager load to the sled.

"Well, well, it's lucky I happened along—in one way it's lucky."

At the soft-spoken words from the open doorway, Barclay's hollow eyes flashed from his work to the speaker, while his hands flew to the stock of his rifle, thrust beneath the lashings of his canvas-covered load. The man in the doorway laughed, then entered and closed the door.

"Don't be a fool, Barclay," he said. "I watched you through the window when you tried to build your fire. Think I'd throw myself wide open, if I didn't know you was as helpless as a kid? Why, I could plug you a half dozen times before you could get at your rifle!"

The stranger had drawn no weapon, yet Barclay, realizing his helplessness, desisted in his frantic attempt to disentangle his rifle from the frozen lash rope.

"You're right," he said bitterly. "I *am* a fool. I was a fool to come to Alaska in the first place, and now, half mad from the cold and hunger, I would have killed you if I could, instead of letting you save my life."

"Bet your life I wouldn't take any chances on you, Barclay." The stranger had seized Barclay's rifle and deftly ejected the last shell from its magazine. "That talk about killin' me—say, you ain't talkin' to Jim Meredith, boy. I ain't been a deputy marshal five years up here for nothin'. When a guy's already killed one man, he sure wouldn't stop at gettin' his second one."

"Simmons died, then?" queried Bar-

clay apathetically. "I didn't know; the last I heard was just before I left Seattle; they thought he would live."

Meredith turned from the crackling fire he had started and regarded Barclay curiously. "Then what did you run away for?" he demanded. "So long as you thought he would live, why didn't you stay and face the music?"

"Because I was a fool, I suppose." Barclay was warming his hands over the tiny stove, the battered sides of which now shone a magic red. "The thought of the penitentiary must have set me crazy, for I've always had a dread of confinement. And that's funny, too, when you consider that I've always been confined in an office. You see, since I was a kid I've wanted to be an outdoor man."

Meredith had been listening thoughtfully. "That is funny," he said. The room was warm now, and he removed his fur cap and parka and tossed them to Barclay's sled. "Take my case; I don't know anything else but this outdoor stuff. So, of course, I eat it up. But you—you'd soon get mighty sick of it."

"I'd never tire of it," Barclay disclaimed, as he studied his slender, dead-white fingers, which he still held out to the warmth of the stove. "I know I've botched things a lot this trip." He glanced at the matches he had thrown about the floor when he had futilely tried to light a fire. "But I know I'd soon pick up—you see, I'd learn because I like this sort of life so much."

Meredith grinned. "A man that can't even build a fire, well, he's sure got quite a few things to learn, all right."

"I was up against it all right when you showed up." Barclay looked at his loaded sled. "My fingers were so numb that I couldn't unfasten my own knots. When you came I was trying to get at my sleeping bag. That was my last chance, and I might have made it if I hadn't lost so much time trying to kindle that fire. All my matches were wet," he added apologetically; "though, I suppose, that's liable to happen to any one?"

Meredith's answer was the production of a waterproof match safe. "You *are* green," he said as he unscrewed the top of his match safe, disclosing a small block of sulphur matches. "I guess you was too near froze up to notice when I lit that fire, but these little red-headed fellows are the kind all old-timers use in this country. The parlor kind of a guy is the one that carries the parlor match."

"I see," said Barclay gravely. "I should have had a waterproof safe in my outfit, of course. You can start a fire with any sort of match so long as it is kept dry."

"Yes, but any kind of a match *might* get wet, too. There's always a chance, you know." Meredith studied Barclay quizzically for a moment. "Say, do you know you're about the funniest number I ever bumped into?" he suddenly asked.

"Why?" Barclay asked simply.

"Why? Well, here you are, under arrest for *murder,* and you're talkin' away about matches and match safes! I'd call it funny—though maybe you're just stallin' till you get a chance to make your get-away."

"I see nothing strange about the little talk we've just had," Barclay replied coldly. "We might as well discuss matches as anything else. But if you think I've been stalling, as you put it, perhaps you'd better watch your step while we're together."

"Oh, I'll do that all right. I ain't very likely to forget the way you went for your rifle a little bit ago. But listen while I tell you something." Meredith's eyes had suddenly grown hard. "Don't you try any funny work with me. I'd drop you like a dog. I'd be a fool not to!"

"If you used your head, you'd understand that threats can't worry a man in my position. Naturally, if I have a chance to escape—any chance at all, mind you—I shall certainly take it." Barclay smiled as he went on. "But just to set your mind at rest, let me tell you that I wouldn't be talking about taking a chance if I thought for a minute that one might pop up."

"I'll see that no chance pops up!" An automatic had magically appeared in Meredith's hand. "Turn around there! I'm goin' through you just out of habit, though I'm positive sure you've got no gun on you."

Barclay obediently turned his back, and Meredith swiftly made his search. Thoroughly satisfied, the deputy put away his weapon. Barclay was half amused, half curious.

"Why were you so sure I had no gun on me?" he asked.

"That's easy. If you'd had a gun on you, you wouldn't have gone for your rifle when I first came in."

"Correct, of course; I should have thought of that. But since you were so positive that I had no gun on me, why did you search me?"

"It was just my *judgment* that you was unarmed, and with a man like you, I don't trust my judgment, Barclay." Meredith grinned. "Now ask me why I didn't search you sooner."

"Yes, I'd like to know that, too."

"Well, I had my parka off, and you had yours on. No matter how fast you are, you couldn't beat a handicap like that. And now I'm goin' out to unhitch and feed my dogs, so the next question is—why am I takin' your sled and rifle along? The answer is—that I don't know what you've got on your sled under that tarp, but I'll go through it after supper; and you *might* have an extra cartridge for that rifle, or you might try and use it as a club. Feed the fire while I'm gone, and I'll get us a bite to eat when I come back. If you should get a notion to try and use a stick of that stove wood on me, or——" Meredith drew himself up to his full height and threw back a pair of powerful shoulders. "Or if you want to try rough and tumble with me, just remember that I'm nearly twice as big as you are—and I'm three times as hard."

That night, after their evening meal, the two men crawled into their sleeping bags. Jim Meredith turned upon his elbow to extinguish the flickering candle which stood between them, and paused for a close study of Barclay's pale face. The black rings about Barclay's hollow eyes served to accentuate the pallor of his face, which shone a dead white through its week's stubble of black beard. In spite of his weakened condition, there was grim determination in Barclay's gray eyes as they steadily returned Meredith's stare.

"Well?" Barclay asked at length.

"I don't know if it's well or not," Meredith replied, and hauled his Mackinaw coat, rolled into a pillow, from beneath the head of his sleeping bag. His hand fished into a pocket; there was a dull jangling sound, and a moment later two circlets of steel flashed out in the candlelight. "I started in to be careful with you, Barclay," Meredith continued, "and I think I'd better keep it up. Here, stick out your hands! *You* won't sleep so good, maybe, but *I'll* sleep a blame sight better."

Meredith, as he had announced, expected to take no chances on the slender Barclay making his escape. During the day Barclay was forced to mush ahead of the deputy's dogs, and Meredith, clinging to the handlebars of his big basket sled, could not possibly lose sight of his prisoner. At night Barclay slept in handcuffs beside the deputy. Meredith had started out to be careful, and in the days that followed, he did not relax his vigilance for a moment.

Barclay's opportunity came at the end of his fifth day's travel with Meredith. The deputy had pitched his tent in a clump of spruce, and after setting up his trail stove, had taken his ax and gone in search of a dry tree for firewood. Barclay, shivering with the extreme cold, waited at the tent flaps, listening for the crash of a falling tree which meant warmth and food. The crash came in due time, following the rhythmic thud thud of Meredith's ax, but with the crash came a piercing, agonized cry from the deputy marshal. On the instant that he heard Meredith's cry of agony, Barclay felt that his chance had come. Hope flamed high as he floundered through the snow, following Meredith's trail.

"Here, Barclay; come give me a hand!"

Even before the big deputy called out, Barclay saw him as he lay there in the snow, pinioned beneath the great spruce that he had dropped. He was helpless; that was certain. Barclay instinctively hurried forward, then abruptly stopped short.

"Judas Priest, man," said Meredith, groaning, "don't stand there like a dummy. Get a pole—pry me out of this!"

"I might do that," said Barclay coolly. He plowed through the snow to the deputy's side and looked down at him. It was bitter cold, but beads of perspiration stood out on Meredith's forehead. "But before I do anything," Barclay continued, "suppose we have an understanding."

"Understanding!" In his impotent rage Meredith completely lost his head for a time. He lost sight of the fact that the tables were turned; that his late prisoner was now his captor. "Get that pry and go to work, or I'll——"

"You're a fool," Barclay interrupted. "That's what you called me when we first met; called me that because I couldn't build a fire with wet matches. I may be green, but I've yet to fell a tree as you did this one"

"I slipped, you idiot! I slipped just as she started to go."

"No matter. But so far as I am concerned you'll stay there unless you do what I want—and do it quick. I want you to take the trail alone to the coast and leave me your dogs. You may as well agree; I can take them, anyhow, you know."

"So you'd do that, would you? You'd leave me here to freeze?"

"I certainly will; it's my only chance. You remember I warned you that I'd take any chance that popped up."

More conversation followed, and when at last it was clear that there would be no yielding on the part of either, Barclay reluctantly turned to go. Meredith, half buried in the snow, struggled desperately, and finally he succeeded in reaching his Mackinaw pocket. Half crazed with suffering, a wild, triumphant light shone in his eyes as he deliberately leveled his automatic at Barclay's retreating back.

"Stop!"

Barclay turned at the word, and Meredith made a short, menacing gesture with his weapon. Scarcely thirty feet separated them, and the deputy's aim was deadly. His automatic was held as steadily as if it were clamped in a vise.

"I've got you dead to rights, Barclay," he gasped out with an oath. "You can't pull nothin' that raw on Jim Meredith—and get away with it, you can't. Come back here, or I'll turn loose!"

"Why, of course I'll come back." Barclay began slowly to retrace his steps. "I would have come back, anyhow—without your pulling the gun, I mean—I was only bluffing. I hoped you would give in, you stubborn fool; but I never would have left you here to freeze."

"You're a dirty liar!" Meredith re-

torted. "You're stallin' again, but it won't get you anywheres. You've been waitin' for this chance ever since I caught up with you, but you can't slip nothin' over on Jim Meredith. Now then, you dirty chechahco killer, you take that pole and——"

Meredith's voice suddenly broke; the muzzle of his automatic described an arc to the right, was swung back slowly with an apparent effort; then as it waveringly began to circle, Barclay sprang forward. Before he could reach Meredith, the weapon lay buried in the snow, and the deputy was mumbling incoherently. "You can't get away with it, Barclay; I'll see you dead first."

That was all that Barclay was able to distinguish. Meredith was now unconscious. Barclay first recovered the automatic and pocketed it; then with the pole which Meredith had indicated, he attempted to raise the log from the unconscious deputy. This he was unable to do, so he set to work with Meredith's ax. Unskilled with the ax, it took Barclay almost a half hour to do the work that a woodsman would have accomplished in ten minutes. Finally it was done, and, exerting every ounce of his strength, he half carried, half dragged Meredith to the tent.

Meredith recovered consciousness soon after Barclay had procured firewood and fed the dogs. The deputy moodily refused the food which Barclay prepared and offered him. Barclay finished his meal without a word, then proceeded to roll his sleeping bag and return the food to Meredith's grub box. With a sharp glance at the deputy, he next took his rifle and Meredith's ax and left the tent. It was almost dark, but Meredith could see his late prisoner moving about among the dogs.

"What're you doin'?" he asked at length, when he heard the sharp snaps which told him that Barclay was harnessing the dogs. "You hitchin' up?"

Barclay projected his head through the tent flaps. "There is enough wood here for to-night," he said. "More than enough, if you turn in soon, and I've left you grub for two days. You said it was one day's mush, but I'm leaving you two days' grub to be on the safe side. I'm leaving you matches, too—enough to see you through—though I'm taking your waterproof safe. I'll need it, and you won't."

Meredith groaned but said nothing.

"I've shot square with you, you see," Barclay went on. "But now you had better crawl into your sleeping bag, for I've got to take your tent and stove along. You won't need them, and I will. Let's see," he concluded thoughtfully, "I'll have at least a day's start on you—or whoever you might send after me—so I'll make it all right, I think. With what I've learned of trail life from you, taking me next time will be quite a different matter."

Barclay picked up the stove in his mittened hands, emptied it in the snow and placed it on the sled. Then he took down the tent and lashed it into a compact roll. Meredith had not moved.

"You had better crawl into your sleeping bag," Barclay advised, as he tossed the tent into the basket sled. "I got you out from under the tree, but from now on it's up to you. I'm going now—so long."

Still Meredith said nothing. Barclay stepped to the handlebars of the sled, prepared to give the word "mush" to the dogs, hesitated an instant, then opened the grub box and brought out a candle. This he lighted and, sheltering the flickering flame with his mittened hands, held it close to Meredith's face. Meredith's eyes were closed, but he was not asleep, for his face was drawn in agony. Abruptly he opened his eyes and glared balefully at Barclay in the candlelight.

"Well, you chechahco devil," he

gasped out, "you got me licked, after all."

"I've done just what you or any other man would do—in my shoes."

"Oh, I don't know that I'm blamin' you so much. It's your life or mine. You might though, take that gun o' mine and—it'd be better than to leave me here to freeze."

"Crawl in your bag, you fool!"

"You know I can't; you must know it. You know my leg's busted."

"Your leg's broken?" he asked incredulously.

"If it wasn't, do you suppose I'd be layin' here and let you steal my team and stuff? Think I wouldn't *try* to stop you?"

Meredith had fainted again. Barclay, who knew nothing about setting a broken leg, put with difficulty the big man into the sleeping bag on which he lay. It required Barclay's last ounce of strength, but at last he succeeded in lifting the limp form of the deputy into the sled, after which he placed a duffle bag under his head for a pillow.

"Come, gee!" Barclay called to the leader of the team, and the dogs swung to the right, floundered through the snow, and gained the hard trail again. Barclay had headed them in the opposite direction to the one he had originally intended taking. "To the marshal's office," he muttered softly under his breath. Then to the dogs he shouted, "Mush!"

An hour passed, then two. Save for the creak of sled runners on the hard river trail, and an occasional soft-spoken "Mush" to the dogs from Barclay, there was no sound to break the stillness of the dark night. Meredith may have been conscious at times; if so, Barclay was not aware of it. The deputy, muffled in his sleeping bag, made no sound.

"Now, what is the matter?" Barclay exclaimed suddenly. The dogs had come to an unexpected stop, and Barclay peered ahead. He was unable to see anything except the vague forms of the five Malemutes. The leader whimpered and refused to lead on at Barclay's sharp commands. Barclay had no whip; he floundered through the snow to the river bank where he broke off a small, frozen alder.

Had Barclay been an experienced man with Alaska sled dogs, he would have gone forward to investigate when his leader refused to go on. Now, at the sharp crack of the alder, the nervous animal whined softly; then with a frightened yelp, started forward at Barclay's approach. Barclay had just time to catch the handlebars of the flying sled as it shot past. The next instant, instead of the hard snow trail on which he had been traveling, he found that his moccasined feet were slipping insecurely on glare ice.

The ice, fresh frozen over that most dreaded of Alaskan dangers, a river's overflow, easily sustained the weight of the dogs, but gave way at once to the heavier weight of the sled. Barclay, following, found himself trotting through a foot of water. He was in for it now, but there was no turning back. He clung desperately to the sled's handlebars and followed through.

It was soon over. They were across the overflow in less than a minute, but the damage was done; Barclay's feet were wet. Already he could feel the sting of the cold, and, greenhorn that he was, he knew that there was only one way out of his predicament. He must make camp at once.

Barclay did not take time to pitch the tent. As soon as he had "gee'd" the dogs from the river trail, he seized the ax from the sled and began to search for firewood. At first he anticipated no difficulty in finding a dead tree. But Barclay had never before looked for firewood in the dark. Always before he had made camp while it was yet day-

light. Presently his heart sank as he realized that his chance of finding a dry tree there in the darkness was but one in a thousand. He rushed back to the sled, seized Meredith by the shoulders, and shook him violently.

"Meredith!" he called. "Wake up; my feet are freezing! What will I do?"

But Meredith, snugly tucked away in his sleeping bag, made no reply. Unconscious again! For a moment Barclay became panicky; then as he realized that to give way in such fashion would mean certain death, he managed to get hold of himself. He became calm.

"You poor fool!" he presently exclaimed. He was berating himself, not the man on the sled. "A nice woodsman *you* are!"

Barclay had suddenly recalled the way Meredith had been making their tea fires at noon. The deputy's method had been surprisingly simple, and Barclay wondered that he had not thought of it before. Why, he did not need to find a dry tree, after all, for low-hanging, umbrellalike boughs, as dry as a bone, were to be found at the base of every green spruce in the forest. He had been wasting time in a futile search for a dead tree. What a fool he had been!

At the base of the nearest tree, a huge, green spruce, Barclay crouched and tore at the dry twigs which held out the promise of life to him. He carefully heaped the twigs on snow, tight packed with his mittened hands. It was dark there in the forest, yet against the white of the snow he could see well enough to arrange the dry boughs. When all was in readiness, he fumbled for, and found, Meredith's match safe. With bared hands he unscrewed its top, discovering that the match safe contained but three matches.

"Oh, well," he said, somewhat dismayed that he had failed to replenish from Meredith's supply in the grub box, "if I can't get a fire going with these, there are plenty more to be had at the sled."

The first match, which he struck and carefully held sheltered in his cupped hands, as he had seen Meredith do it, went out instantly. The second gave feeble promise for a time, then flickered and was extinguished by his own overzealous efforts to protect it from the breeze which came from the river. With the third match, however, Barclay was successful. The twigs blazed up with a crackle. In the flickering light from his tiny fire, Barclay sat up with an exclamation of triumph as he reached above for more and heavier boughs. In doing so, he inadvertently dislodged a blob of snow which fell precisely in the center of his carefully pyramided dry and burning twigs. With a sharp, maddening hiss, the little fire was hopelessly smothered in spite of Barclay's frantic efforts to keep it going.

His predicament was bad enough, yet it might have been much worse, Barclay thought, as he rushed to the sled. Quickly he threw aside the tent, which covered the grub box, then commenced a fumbling search for the matches. They were there, just as he knew they were, but, as he touched them, he found them wet. Each tiny block of the precious matches was either wet or its surface iced over. Instantly he realized with a gasp of horror that that portion of the load which was at the bottom of the sled had been made wet by the overflow through which it had passed.

"Meredith!" Barclay was shaking the deputy again. "For heaven's sake, wake up! I'm freezing, man!"

Barclay's appeal to Meredith carried a helpless note; he had no hope of assistance from that or any other source now. For what, he asked himself, could the most experienced woodsman in the world do in such a case as this?

To his astonishment, Meredith made answer from the sled.

"So you're freezin', are you, Barclay? Then why don't you make yourself a fire? I would, if I was you."

"You would, would you!" Barclay was in a rage. In spite of the fact that he was facing death and had but a short time to live, he found himself giving way to an insensate rage at Meredith. Why, the fool was as near death as he, yet the idiot was calmly advising him to build a fire! "I'd like to see you or any other man make a fire," he shouted. Then he added, without hope, "If you *do* know how, tell me."

"It's easy, Barclay. Look in my Mackinaw pocket—right hand side—I always carry a few pieces of birch bark there. It turns like a torch. Light it up, then add some spruce boughs, you know. Nothin' to it when you got some birch bark along to——"

"It's matches!" Barclay interrupted. "Birch bark is no good without matches, and——"

"You took my safe. Did you lose it?"

"No, but I used the last one, and——"

"Then look in the grub box. There's plenty there."

"They're wet; we came through an overflow; they're wet, I tell you! I suppose *you* can start a fire with wet matches, can't you?"

"Sure, it's easy, Barclay. Give me a bunch of 'em."

"You infernal idiot!" Barclay shouted. "You, with your broken leg. You're in as bad shape as I am with my frozen feet, yet you lie there and try to be funny!"

"Hand me a block of matches—quick!" Meredith's command was delivered in a crisp, businesslike tone, which carried conviction. The fellow might be out of his head, but it was evident that he was not trifling. Barclay found the matches.

"Here they are," he said lifelessly.

"Good"

An instant later, from inside Meredith's sleeping bag, came a strange, rasping sound. It was Meredith's calloused palms rubbed briskly together. Meredith chuckled. "More'n one way to skin a cat, Barclay—when you know how," he continued. "You can dry one of these red-headed sulphur matches—the parlor kind not so good—with friction, or you can dry 'em in your hair. Here she is, all nice and dry. Get that bark and make your fire!"

Barclay took the match wonderingly, yet with confidence. The deputy seemed to know what he was talking about.

"Don't get anxious and fumble it, Barclay," Meredith cautioned from the sled. "I'll be dryin' out another match in case you need it."

Ten feet distant the birch bark flared up. Barclay carefully added dry spruce boughs, and quickly had a fire going. With a good stock of boughs at hand, he set to work removing his frozen moccasins. The fire had set the shadows dancing through the forest, but Meredith's face was quite distinct in the firelight as he peered out above the sled's basket.

"Take no chances on your feet, Barclay," he advised. "If there's any show at all of 'em bein' frosted, rub 'em good with snow. It's always best to be on the safe side."

Barclay said nothing, but applied the snow as directed. He rubbed vigorously, groaning aloud as the returning circulation sent sharp twinges of most excruciating pain through his feet and ankles. Half an hour later he was ready for the trail, quietly taking his place at the handlebars of the sled. When they were once more on the river, Meredith spoke again.

"Barclay," he said chokingly, "you're the gamest, whitest man that I ever met up with—and I don't like this."

"Don't like what?"

"Your puttin' your head into a noose to save my life. It ain't right, and I'm sorry you didn't make your break. I'm sorry you're bringin' me in. I wish—dog-gone this marshal job of mine, anyhow!"

"It's all right," said Barclay grimly. "There was a good deal of justification in that Simmons matter. Don't worry about me."

Meredith raised himself in his sleeping bag and pointed to the arc of a red sun, which was just finding its way over the summit of a spruce-clad mountain capped with white. "She comes up late these days, Barclay," he remarked in a small voice for such a big man. "Breakfast'll be ready at the road house and all the boys'll be there to see you sled me in."

The big deputy abruptly relapsed into silence. Barclay exhibited no curiosity; he said nothing until they reached the village. Then he asked the way to the marshal's office. Meredith gruffly told him.

"And that's the marshal there," he added, indicating a short, genial man of middle age, who was watching their approach with considerable mystification. "He knows the dogs, you see, and he don't understand your drivin' 'em."

Barclay wasted no words. "Here's your deputy," he said briefly, when he had halted the dogs. "He has a broken leg, so I brought him in. I'm Barclay."

Barclay had scarcely finished speaking when his white face under its stubble of black took on an angry red. A most surprising thing had just occurred. Meredith, with a shamefaced grin, had crawled briskly from his sleeping bag and was volubly explaining.

"It was a dirty trick, Barclay," he said, speaking hurriedly, as if eager to complete a disagreeable job, "but you had my gun, and I figured you'd use it, certain sure. Then, when you was ready to leave, I thought I'd try that—well, I faked that busted leg. I might have licked you in a rough and tumble, if I could've got to you quick enough—but then, one of us would've likely got killed, too. I *was* hurt under that tree all right. It wasn't any fake when I went unconscious several times, but at that, there wasn't a time when I couldn't've walked, if——"

"You contemptible——"

"Hold on! Wait a minute!" The marshal had interrupted both Barclay and Meredith. "Jim, you did all right, and so did you, Barclay. Listen while I tell you the news. Three days ago I received a cable on that Simmons case, and you're in the clear, Barclay. Your brother-in-law confessed and took a jolt of ten years."

Barclay sat down heavily on the sled. "This isn't another trick?" he asked, as his hollow eyes fixed themselves wonderingly upon the marshal. "You're not—stalling?"

"You were a fool to run away," the marshal resumed. "Of course it was mighty white of you to try to save your sister's hus——"

"White!" cried big Jim Meredith. "Sure it's white! Aynthing he'd do is bound to be white!" He plumped down on the sled beside Barclay. "Let me tell you something, Barclay," he said huskily, as his huge arm gently circled Barclay's slender shoulders, "just like matches, there's two kinds of men in this country. There's a few of the parlor kind, but mostly they're headheads.

"Hey, are you crazy?" cried the marshal.

"I hope to *say* I ain't!" retorted Jim Meredith. Then gruffly, to hide his emotion, he concluded his speech to Barclay. "You was the parlor kind when you come into the country, but from this on you'll strike fire in any old kind of weather. You're a redhead now all right!"

Pioneer Towns of the West

(St. Louis) By Erle Wilson

Author of "Hays," etc.

LONG ago the site of St. Louis was peopled by the "Mound Builders." Here along the banks of the Mississippi River flourished an ancient city before the beginnings of American chronicles. Later the wigwams of the Indians rose up by the edge of the Father of Waters, where they were discovered by the early trappers who navigated the mighty stream. The first permanent white settlement was made in 1764, when Pierre Laclede Liguest established a trading post here.

During the days of its early history St. Louis was under first Spanish and later French rule, passing under the sovereignty of the United States after the Louisiana Purchase. To this picturesque river town came the hardy settlers who crossed the country in prairie schooners. Down its straggling streets the stagecoach drivers swung their lumbering vehicles, and across its ferry dashed the dauntless pony express riders of the pioneer period. In 1767 it was a crude frontier settlement of log cabins with a motley population of perhaps five hundred people, consisting of hunters, trappers, boatmen, half-breeds, Indian, and negro slaves.

At the time when deerskins and furs were virtually the currency of the realm, St. Louis was the center of trapping for the whole West country. After it became United States territory this frontier town also was a military supply point for the great West. In 1817 its development was stimulated greatly when steamship traffic was started with Louisville, New Orleans, and the lower Missouri River. St. Louis was incorporated as a town as early as 1808, and became a city fifteen years later. Due to its large river trade this Mississippi River port grew rapidly, and at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, it was a city of great commercial importance.

Since the Civil War the history of this Missouri city has been that of

marked economic development. In 1904 a world's fair to celebrate the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase was held here. At different periods of its existence St. Louis has been attacked by fire, flood, epidemics, and wind. In 1849 a gigantic blaze flamed along the levee and adjacent streets, destroying six million dollars' worth of steamers, buildings, and merchandise. A little later an epidemic of cholera took off one twentieth of the city's inhabitants; from '72 to '75 smallpox raged. Destructive floods and tornadoes have visited this Mississippi River port in turn, and in '96 a cyclone did ten million dollars' worth of damage in twenty minutes.

To-day St. Louis covers an area of sixty-one square miles of Missouri land, and has a population of seven hundred and seventy-two thousand eight hundred and ninety-seven people. Situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River, about twenty miles below its confluence with the Missouri, and two hundred miles above the influx of the Ohio, it is a port of great importance. St. Louis has a frontage of nineteen miles on the Mississippi River, which is spanned by four bridges. The Eads Bridge, besides being an engineering masterpiece, is one of the world's most sightly bridges. The Municipal Bridge, built by the city for the free passage of vehicles, pedestrians and trains, is two miles long and is the largest double-span steel bridge in the world. The Merchants Bridge has a single deck and is for railroad traffic only, while the McKinley Bridge was built for inter-urban cars, having a roadway for vehicles and a path for pedestrians.

In the realms of commerce and industry St. Louis holds a substantial place. This Missouri city is the world's largest shoe market, and possesses the biggest individual shoe manufacturing plant in the world. It is the premier trunk market in the United States. It leads the world in the manufacture and sale of stoves and ranges. It also has the largest drug house in the world, and is the foremost drug and chemical market in America. The largest street car manufacturing plant in the world is situated here; St. Louis street cars are used by all nations. Automobiles throughout the globe are supplied with St. Louis piston rings, and in this city is located the largest sugar-mill machinery market in the world. Starting its existence as a fur-trading post it is to-day the supreme fur market in the world.

St. Louis is surrounded by the rich farming lands of the Mississippi valley, where sixty per cent of the nation's agricultural output is grown. It is also located in the center of the world's greatest inland waterway system. A fleet of steel barges operated by the United States government plies between St. Louis and New Orleans, making of this Mississippi River port virtually a seaport. Exports from St. Louis are sent by this route to the South and West, into the Gulf of Mexico, and through the Panama Canal to all the world's markets.

As a home city St. Louis ranks high, possessing residential streets that are counted among the handsomest to be found anywhere. Its school system is efficient and noted for its completeness. St. Louis is the home of two of the largest and best educational institutions in America, the St. Louis University and Washington University. St. Louis also has a large and well-equipped public library, housed in a most impressive and beautiful building.

Its park system is a fine one. Notable among these public playgrounds is Forest Park, one of the three largest parks in American cities. Here are located the St. Louis Art Museum, Municipal Open-air Theater, Jefferson Memorial, St. Louis Zoo, free public golf links, Art Hill, lagoons, fountains, picnic

grounds, bridle path for horseback riding, tennis courts, baseball grounds, and cricket lawns. Other recreational spots are O'Fallon Park, with its wonderful ravines; Chain of Rocks Park, with its remarkable view of the Mississippi River; Tower Grove Park, with its world-famed lily ponds and statue of Shakespeare; Carondelet Park, with its natural scenic beauty; and Fairground Park, where horse racing and country fairs were held in the old days. In the Missouri Botanical Garden, given to St. Louis by Henry Shaw, a public-spirited citizen, is found the largest collection of plant life that has ever been assembled in America.

The climate of this Missouri city is so favorable that open-air activities can be enjoyed nine months of the year. Facilities for recreation are many and in amateur athletics St. Louis takes a leading place. The municipality conducts a number of leagues in baseball, football, basket ball, tennis, golf, rowing, and swimming. Within an hour's ride from St. Louis are found the many resorts on the Meramec River, while a half day's journey takes one to the Ozarks. Here along the winding courses of the Gasconade, Current, and Big Piney rivers are ideal camping sites, bathing, boating and hunting. Club houses, cabins, rustic cottages and hunting lodges provide comfortable accommodations for vacationists, while camping parties may obtain reliable guides, boats, and equipment for floats down the shallow rapids of the Ozark streams.

The city is rich in mementos of its stirring past. The old courthouse, from the steps of which slaves were auctioned off in ante-bellum days, is still standing. A granite boulder in the courthouse yard marks the starting point of the old Boone's Lick Trail, over which the early settlers of the West journeyed. In the Jefferson Memorial, the home of the Missouri Historical Society, is found a remarkable collection of the records of the history of St. Louis, consisting of relics of the Mound Builders, curios of the Indian tribes, and relics of the pioneers.

Near the city stands a log cabin built by Ulysses S. Grant, at the time when he was a farmer near St. Louis and sold wood for a living. The cabin is surrounded by a fence built of rifle barrels collected from the battlefields of the Civil War. Seven miles east of St. Louis are the historic group of Mounds, including the famous Monk's Mound, said to be the greatest in the world. This huge pyramid of earth is one thousand and eighty feet long, seven hundred and eighty feet wide, and one hundred and four feet high, spreading its bulk over sixteen acres of ground. About twelve miles east of St. Louis is Jefferson Barracks, a national military post of the first class.

The government of St. Louis is vested in a mayor, a municipal assembly, and certain executive officers, independently elected. The present mayor is the Honorable Henry W. Kiel. Twenty-six railroads serve this Missouri city, and the St. Louis Union Station is one of the largest railroad terminals in the world. St. Louis has abundant and cheap power, and a splendid waterworks system, the supply being pumped from the Mississippi River.

In next week's issue Olympia, Washington, will be described.

The Round-Up

GOT one of them there author gents here with us this evenin', folks. He's none other than Clem Yore. Let's let him speak first, before he writes it; what say? All right, Clem, tell us:

"Boss and People: I admired your chatter of the recent issue, wherein one sure-enough, riggin'-knowing relay boy spoke up in meeting and told Spanish Bit where she headed in on relay cruelty. Let me tell you, folks, old Indianapolis Doc, which same comes from that flea-bit Montana where I've shivered myself warm in a saddle trying to keep eating cows from freezing to death, was sure right. And I add to his'n that if Spanish Bit—God bless her!—will ride a relay string, wearing a four-inch shank and a three-inch rowel set of spurs and will use them when she climbs on a change horse, and will come in yanking a half-breed, spade, Sonora, or mouth-murdering bit of any kind, here's one old, crippled rider what'll put in with her on any kind of a game and fling his hat so far it'll look like dust kicked up by a dime. And I'll buy Spanish Bit a bit of T-bone steak, too.

"Relay riding is the toughest job to be found, and when you're all done, if you can utter two whoops when the judge says, 'You win, Sliver Kid,' then you've turtled them broncs around the track, and have had a hay-stacker lift you from a saddle and drop you in the middle of the next nag, and it was plump after supper time when you finished. Nay, nay, Spanish, not to us old-timers do you spill that stuff about relay-horse cruelty! That cruelty a boy or a gal gets is second to none in the contest game. Mabel Strickland, Lorena Trickey, and a few other girls like Mary Yarbury, Texas Annie, Laughing Belle, Mesquite Maude, Hermosillo Nita, and a negress by the name of New Orleans Lou, these were the greatest that ever dropped into a bee-stung flat saddle and risked death. These women were desperate; some are alive, and all of them put their mounts into places that brought the toughest, hardest-riding, hardest-to-thrill arena grounds and grand stands to their feet in frenzies of madness. Mabel Strickland, to my mind, is the greatest all-around woman that ever slipped a leg over a horse; and Lorena Trickey, the greatest relay rider of her sex the world

of Western riders ever produced. She'll take any risk, travel any route, and the horse isn't made that she won't crawl onto and try to race. Let these women, any of them, do what Spanish Bit says relay riders do, and they wouldn't get to the first quarter-mile post. Relay riding is a horse's game, and the horse must have its head at all stages of the play. Lorena Trickey and Mabel Strickland mount their change horses—and they slap on their own saddles before they crawl into them—more often on the cushion of the air and the ladder of their nerve than otherwise. And I've seen both girls with but a two-finger grip of a ring, in the rigging somewhere, drag along the ground and literally crawl up on the rump of their ponies and into the saddles.

"What would either do with spurs? Or a whip hanging on a wrist? Lord bless my soul! They don't pack enough to burden a swallow.

"Tell it to them horse marines, Spanish Bit! Us old grass eaters and smooth-mouthed boys what lived in the sage before it turned to giving out the odor of talcum powder, because of so many schoolma'am homesteaders, and who thought Omaha was a place to tear up by the roots to see how she run—we've hit the grit relaying, and you can't make us sign a petition sending such riders to jail for the browbeating of their broncs. If a boy or a girl ain't got hand-forged steel in a backbone and pure sand in a craw, then it's circus riders they want to be and not crowd in where a real relay rider would jam them agin' a fence and a rodeo hand would holler for the ambulance to cut across in front of the broncho peelers and take a load to the hospital tent.

"Right here let me say, with Indianapolis Doc, that if it's rodeo, stampede, round-up, cowboys' reunion, or what not that you intend to ride in, or fly at, don't forget that the animal what gets the hardest treatment, always and all ways, is that beast called—man. And this goes even if he spells his name Mabel, Lorena, Annie, Laughing Belle, or Mesquite Maude. There's nothing lily-like abou it. It's rough—and I will say, nice!"

Here comes Samuel J.—"Jackass"—Lantz, and he sure has a good idea for gettin' some interestin' talks here on some evenin' not long distant, we hope. Jackass Lantz hails from Imperial, California. All right, Jackass, bray:

"Boss AND Folks: Is there any objection if I unpack an' camp under this mesquite? Kinda like to horn in on this gabfest an' swap lies with some of you ol' desert rats—if you haint jist toteetally dried up same's a daid horn'd toad. Is it good water here? Nope, but I passed it a while back—over to the right a few pages—on trail of some lost shipmates. Oh, jist jackassin' aroun' in the east part of San Diego County, an' the western part of Imperial County, California. Sure—gold, silver, copper, platinum, helium, or anything else that might be in the bean pot. Who—*me?* Well, as quick as I git a coupla questions off'n my chest, I'll tell you what they used to call me 'round this neck of the woods. Who's got the most smokin'? Thanks. I got papers, and I'll jist steal a handful of this till I get to a store—rolled my last cig back at Carrizo, Washington, an' that ornery jack—git away fr'm here, naw you don't. Beat it. Now, then, some of you ol' bewhiskered sidewinders open up an' tell me who's president now! Never heerd of him. Was he? How come they made *him* the goat? Yeah? First I heerd of that. Too bad.

"Now, then, tell me this: How many of the Round-up folks have actual personal knowledge that a horse or a burro can and do locate water when thirsty—in the desert or out? So many stories

endow horses and especially burros with the instinct to locate *other* water than that which they *know,* but whether that instinct is derived from one or more of their physical senses is not clear to me. I had an experience once concerning this matter that throws the diamond hitch on it as far as I'm concerned, and I will recount it after I get the low-down from others—providing desert rats are allowed to remain in the Round-up camp long enough."

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

THE WHITE WOLF

A SERIAL

By JOHN FREDERICK

The author, himself a breeder and lover of fine dogs, has done something in "The White Wolf," never before accomplished by any one; he has written a really masterly long dog story. This is high praise, but deserved.

BARRED FROM BAR X

A NOVEL

By JOHN S. LOPEZ

Lured from her Eastern home, and kidnaped from the Bar X Ranch, this girl finds herself barred from that she holds worth living for.

A Cure for the Toothache

By G. WELLS

Love and honor may be the chief motives for heroism, but a raging toothache is a substitute in this story.

AND OTHER STORIES Order Your Copy Now

Victor Roehr, 28 Chatham Street, Adelaide, South Australia: "I am a proud wearer of the badge of a Gang which I think is wonderful."

Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either a button for your coat lapel, or a pin. When you order be sure to state which you wish.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

IF we get a few hard knocks, we're apt to have the idea that it's a hard old world full of hard people. There are lots of kind people in the world, country folks and city folks. Country folks, I believe, are supposed to be kinder and more neighborly than those in the city—but are they? Isn't humanity the same all over?

Perhaps you've ridden on a car in the city full of men and women, who were all engrossed in their papers, looking as if they didn't care a rap for anybody but themselves. Just let a blind man get into that car, and see how quickly he'll be given a seat and helped into it; watch how he'll be taken care of when the car approaches his corner. Let a child be lost, or a woman begin to sob. You'll see how kind and solicitous they can be, those bored-looking city folks. Many a gruff-looking countenance masks a heart of gold.

Well, let's have a look at the letters.

DEAR GANG: Bully Billy wants to know how to get a sure-catch fox trap. I am one man in a very few who can take a fox or a wolf the first night my trap is out. The difficulty in taking the fox in a steel trap is due chiefly to his cunning, backed by the keenest sense of smell of any animal. The first step to be taken is the elimination of all human scent. Quacks offer all sorts of tricks, but there is but one way. It takes eight days to prepare the traps, so it requires painstaking hard work, common sense, and cunning to outwit Reynard.

I shall be glad to assist those who are honestly out to get the fox or wolf. If Miss Rivers will bear with me, will send in a long letter on the art of fox trapping.

L. TAYLOR.

Box 14, Concord, N. H.

Send it in, brother; lots of us will be interested in it.

DEAR SISTER OF THE GANG: I'd like to drop a few lines about my State. The natural recreational advantages in east Michigan are many. There are thirty-two State parks, for the most part preserved in their natural condition. There are thousands of lakes and many rivers and streams. I'll just name a few of the chief attractions: The great Lake Huron shore line; the Michigan National Forest of eighty-nine thousand acres; the historically famous Ausable River; the shifting sand dunes of P. H. Hoyt State Park at Rogers City; beautiful Mackinac Island of international fame, the leading Midwest sum-

mer resort since before railroads penetrated the region it occupies. There are many others.

I love to receive and write letters; I will answer all I get.

MRS. B. L. FELDHISER.

Box 471, Rogers City, Mich.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: It may be some one would like to hear about my travels in the many foreign countries I have visited. As a kid of thirteen I ran away from my beautiful home in the East and my wanderlust has carried me to the Hawaiian Islands, the Midway Islands of the Pacific, the Ladrones, the Philippines, Japan, China, Mexico, Canada, England, France, Germany, Spain, not to mention Alaska, our own United States from Canada to the Rio Grande. I know the Western States like a book. The South I never cared for, only Kentucky. Have been in almost every State west of the Mississippi.

I sincerely hope I receive a multitude of letters from readers wanting to know about our country and others. Let 'em all write, young and old. JAMES G. HORNE.

Riverside Hotel, International Falls, Minn.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Have met a few of the Gangsters from the windy city of Chicago, and we have decided to call on you for help. We wish to form a Hollow Tree Club here, and would like to ask all Chicago Gangsters to help us put it over, as we want this to be the best of its kind in the country.

Will all you Chicago Gangsters interested in the club write to me?

JOSEPH C. SISTEK.

1501 West Eighteenth Street, Chicago, Ill.

DEAR FOLKS: I wonder if one of you will move over and let a girl sit by your fire? I like to listen to the various talks; the hoss is my favorite topic. I don't live in the cattle country. I live on a little dairy ranch in the very northwest corner of Washington, and we haven't any saddle horses here.

Does any one know of a place where a girl could help on a cattle ranch, somewhere where the climate is dry? I'm bothered somewhat with catarrh, but otherwise am strong, because I've lived on a farm all my life, and have had to help my dad. I want to be where there are horses and cattle, want the privilege of having a horse to ride.

I read about Miss Mexico's treatment of horses, and my blood just boiled. Will lovers of horses write me, also those who love the range? BILLIE E. MOHR.

R. 1, Box 137, Ferndale, Wash.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am nineteen years old and my sisters are nine and twelve. Our mother is dead; so I am the housekeper. My father has always been a farmer. We lived on a farm in Indiana, but had heard so much about Florida we came here. We do not like the country. The towns are pretty, and we have seen large orange groves, but there are so many lakes and swamps. Living conditions are not good. We enjoyed the trip down; we drove through the mountains of Tennessee, over Mount Eagle and Lookout Mountain.

What we want is to find a home on a ranch in the central or northern part of Arizona. I love horses and enjoy riding; have always wanted to live in the West.

HERMA G. KNISLEY.

843 East Orange Street, Lakeland, Fla.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: How many of the Gang who didn't happen to be present would like to hear about the Pendleton Round-up from one who saw it all, including the Happy Cañon shows? I suppose every one has heard about them. Saw some good riding at Pendleton. Am something of a rider myself, although never for exhibition purposes, just for my own pleasure and sometimes for necessity, as I live in a part of the country where it isn't always possible to make the gas wagons pull the hills, especially in winter.

I want mail from sisters in any part of the world. I've been about every place and am a very friendly sort of person. I don't talk much, but am a good listener. Am twenty years of age and married; am a college graduate, but trying to live it down.

Before I close would like to say that I do wish Gangsters in this part of the country would start wearing The Hollow Tree badges; haven't seen a one since I've been here.

MRS. K. E.

Care of The Tree.

Will rangers, trappers, hunters, and cowboys write to A Texas Cowboy, in care of the Tree?

Betty of Colorado wants to hear from sisters who are in the theatrical business. I'll gladly forward letters to her.

F. D. Bruso, 61 West Magnolia Street, St. Paul, Minnesota, would like information about poultry raising near some of the large Western cities, such as Portland or Denver.

A. Wimester, Fort Klamath, Oregon, is much interested in the San Juan Ba-

sin and asks that brothers from there write him.

Rita of Canada would like to hear from Australian or Canadian sisters in New York City. She's twenty-four and knows the Canadian West. Write her in care of the Tree.

"I am twenty-two, a rolling stone, no home ties, an odd duck, who would like to receive a few letters," says E. L. Maxwell, Bertrand, Nebraska. How about it, brothers?

The Poor Tenderfoot will welcome letters from other Hollow Tree brothers his age, sixteen; address him in my care.

Mrs. O. Nelton, Box 56, Independence, Iowa, will be glad to give information to others about West Virginia or Iowa.

"I hunt a great deal, can give advice about guns and game; also buy furs. I want to go West where I can have all the outdoor life I wish, and would like to hear from hombres out that way," says Robert Williams, Box 31, Wolf Island, Missouri.

Cathryn of Ohio, who is eighteen and a stenographer, requests "a whole truck load of letters."

I. A. Youngs, 71 Hickory Street, Rochester, New York, asks for "a shower;" he complains that his mail box is dust covered.

INVESTIGATING YAVAPAI LANDS' INDIAN RELICS

THE temporary withdrawal of a tract of unsurveyed public land in Yavapai County, Arizona, was recently authorized. It was reported that this land, a tract of 1,280 acres, contained relics of an ancient Indian tribe. Discovery of ruins of Indian dwellings was recently made on the area, and the Smithsonian Institution requested that the land be withheld and protected from vandalism pending an examination in the interests of archæology.

ORPHAN MOUNTAIN LION CUBS FOR ZOO

SOME months ago a hunter killed the mother of two mountain lion cubs in the hills near Deming, New Mexico, and the orphan lions were captured. Later, they found their way into the possession of Fred Murgia, of Deming. The cubs are now over six months old and about half grown. Mr. Murgia plans to send them to Mexico City to be placed in a zoo.

CHIEF CHARLEY BOY FINED

IN Magistrate McGusty's court at Williams Lake, Alberta, a few weeks ago, Chief Charley Boy, of the Redstone band of Chilcotin Indians, was convicted of setting fire on the range in contravention of the Forestry Act and was fined twenty-five dollars or one month in jail with hard labor.

Where To Go and How To Get There

By *John North*

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WESTERN TRAILS—THE OLD OREGON TRAIL

MANY years ago it was said: "The road rules the world; it is the only royal line in a democracy, the call from stagnation in any society, the first aid to the redemption of a nation; it is the umpire in every war, and when the new map is made, it simply pushes on its great campaign of help, hope, brotherhood, efficiency and peace."

This was said long before the advent of the flivver. Who said it I do not know. If his spirit lives—let us hope that he can see what the road has done in our day for this little old planet, that he knows how true his assertion is, now that the road rules the world.

Winter is passing, and spring is on the way. Soon letters will be coming to me from all over the country with queries as to roads and the various routes one should take to reach any and every spot on this continent. Therefore, I am going to do my best in a series of articles to give some general information on the old trails that went a-winding into unknown lands, over which pioneers and homeseekers wended their way in wagons or on horseback or on foot. Many of these have been transformed in late years into good roads along which the noisy little flivver and the stately limousine now roll joyously along, with their burden of sightseers, holiday makers and adventurers. To all of them the road means pleasure, health, happiness or profit, as the case may be. The same diversity exists today as did in the long ago among those who plodded their way to new lands, except that travel has been made easy, and good roads have brought far-off

places of beauty and romance nearer to lovers of nature.

With the general use of the automobile as a traveling vehicle, the old trails became practically useless, and new roads had to be built. As the old trails, however, were usually well chosen as to the routes they followed, their beds were retained wherever possible, for the sentiment attached to them, for their scenic and historic values, and for their convenience. The most attractive of all these, the one that will live forever in the annals of history and in the hearts of the American people, is the Old Oregon Trail, every foot of which is paved with the inspiration of brave deeds. This is the home trail, the one that was trodden by the first pilgrims to the Oregon country. Their one desire was to build up homes and to live in peace with their neighbors. They set an example that was followed later by thousands of other courageous home-seekers, for whom the long, long trail had no terrors, and whose faith in the land at the end of the trail was instrumental in opening up many a lonely desert spot where prosperous communities now flourish.

Artificial life in the big cities is like the artificial flower; it pleases some, but it doesn't satisfy all. There are still people who prefer real roses to the cotton and silk variety, people who like to live close to nature, to enjoy glowing sunsets, to plant trees and watch them grow, to own a piece of ground all their own, and on it a house that they can call "home." It was for this that men and women went over the Old Oregon Trail in covered wagons. They had visions of a happy homeland in the big spaces of the Oregon country, and they endured with patience and heroism the hardships, the discomforts, and the privations of a journey over an unknown trail into an unknown land, where they hoped that their visions might become realities.

The story of the Old Oregon Trail has been told many times, but it is always new. It is the story of human sacrifice, suffering, endurance, determination, and the final fulfillment of a hope that had been before them through all that weary journey, beckoning them onward to its accomplishment.

The honor of discovering the "Great River of the West," the Columbia River, belongs to an American, Captain Robert Gray, who steered his ship across the bar where the flood entered the ocean on May 10, 1792, sailed up the river and gave it the name of his ship, *Columbia*.

In 1805 Lewis and Clark penetrated the wilderness and reached the mouth of the Columbia. They made extensive surveys of the region and, on their return, they gave such a report of the country they had found west of the Rockies that interest was at once stirred up in this hitherto almost unknown stretch of country. Fur companies and traders were especially anxious to have the territory explored, with the view of establishing trading posts and retaining the whole as a vast fur-producing region. The Hudson's Bay Company was first in the field, followed by the Northwest, the Missouri, the Mackinaw, and other fur companies, including the Pacific Fur Company formed by John Jacob Astor, the founder of Astoria, where Captain Thorn, who led an expedition by sea on the ship *Tonquin*, raised the American flag on April 12, 1811.

An expedition by land was made for the same purpose by the Pacific Fur Company, under the leadership of Wilson Price Hunt, and the adventures and hardships that beset this hardy band would fill many volumes. In some stages of the journey, food was so scarce that they had to kill their horses and dogs; at times a few frozen berries was all they could obtain to keep life in their bodies.

There is no expedition in all history which passed through more perils and endured greater hardships than the Hunt expedition did. Facing death at every mile, suffering all the pangs of hunger and cold, attacked with sickness, worn out with exhaustion, this brave little band kept on its way, never once thinking of abandoning its quest, and finally accomplishing the purpose for which it set out.

The party left St. Louis in October, 1810, and proceeded up the Missouri River in boats. It left the river at the village of Arickara, which was probably situated near what is now known as Pierre, South Dakota. Here horses were secured from the Indians in exchange for guns, powder, knives and other articles. The party mounted, loaded its belongings, turned its back upon all communication with the outer world and set out upon its dangerous journey.

Wind River, Wyoming, was reached in September, 1811, and at the end of the same month, the headwaters of the Snake River. At the old post of Fort Henry, near where St. Anthony, Idaho, now stands, rafts and boats were built, and all embarked joyfully on the waters of the Snake. On January 21, 1812, Mr. Hunt and his party reached the Columbia River, at a point between the Umatilla and the mouth of the Wallah Wallah River. Continuing on down the river they came to Astoria on February 15th, over one year from the day they left St. Louis. The distance traveled was about three thousand five hundred miles, although the actual distance from St. Louis, Missouri, to Astoria, Oregon, is only eighteen hundred.

This is the route that was traversed in later years by the covered-wagon trains of the home builders and the pack trains of the gold seekers. Because of the great multitudes that came on this trail, the numbers who died on the way, and because the old trail served in saving the Oregon country to the United States, it has become America's most historic highway—the trail of all trails.

We shall follow this trail in future articles in its various sections and its numerous windings, taking note of the progress and development which have tamed a wild land, where the former sites of the Indian village and tepee are now occupied by prosperous towns and happy homes. The Old Oregon Trail has become an automobile highway, to which many trails lead, and any one who owns a car of the most modest kind, can now follow the trail of the pioneer, the explorer and the covered-wagon homeseeker, without any of the dangers or discomforts that fell to the lot of the trail blazers.

PLANNING BIG HORSE ROUND-UP

DURING this spring, it is planned to have a big round-up of all the worthless horses roaming the ranges of southeastern Montana. These horses are declared to be a menace to the livestock industry, and ranchers of Custer County are anxious to have the marauding creatures destroyed. The plans provide for the division of the county into round-up districts and a thorough campaign of destruction against these worthless horses. The round-up foreman is Bruce Mott.

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

BODKIN, MARGARET, and **JAMES MacKAY.**—Brother and sister who were left orphans about seventy-three years ago in London, Ontario. Margaret was adopted by a family named Bodkin, and James by a family named MacKay. Margaret was married in 1873 to a man named Samuel Nelson. Her oldest daughter, Ida, would like to know her mother's own maiden name and any other information. Mrs. Henry May, R. F. D. 3, Pt. Huron, Michigan.

BRINK, JAMES.—About twenty-eight years of age, tall, brown eyes, curly hair. Last heard from in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, in 1917. Please write to your cousin, Allen H. Brink, R. R. 2, Box 80, Freeport, Pennsylvania.

KING, THOMAS D.—Dark hair and eyes and about forty years of age. Formerly of California. Address M. Curtis, 312 High Street, Watertown, N. Y.

BECKETT, THOMAS P.—Believed to be in Seattle, Washington. Was in the navy for eight years. Please write to your sister, Helen Estes, P. O. Box 738, Tillamook, Oregon.

NUSSER, ALBERT.—Over six feet tall, heavy build, dark complexion. Americanized German. Disappeared from Bard, California, in 1920. His mother would appreciate any news. George F. Nusser, 301A Levonia Avenue, Culver City, California.

SCHMIDT, LEON.—Believed to be living in Florida, formerly of Durhamville, New York. Please write to your brother, Joseph Schmidt, care of this magazine.

DONNELLY or **FRANK CONNORS.**—Eighteen years of age, medium height, brown hair. Formerly of Passaic, New Jersey. Please write to your old pal, Frank Earles, care of A. McLean Company, 960 Main Avenue, Passaic, New Jersey.

LEVY, WALTER or **CORDELL.**—Left Minnesota for New York September, 1924. Has relatives in Flatbush. Write to Alphield Barbis, 735 Harriet Street, Flint, Michigan.

OLSON, MAGNUS.—Please write to your brother, Oscar Olson, P. O. Box 57, Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming.

ROSLEE, MARTIN EVENSEN.—Forty-one years old, dark hair, blue eyes, medium height, carpenter by trade. Lived in San Francisco, California, in May, 1913. Your sister-in-law has news about your mother in Toten, Norway. Mrs. Clara Roslee, 3030 Pierce Street, N. E., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MUNDY, HARRY E.—Communicate with your aunt, Mrs. Flora Mundy Harrington, 1025 Eighth Street, Oakland, California.

MALONE, HENRY.—Belgian by birth, cook by trade, age forty-seven. Left Duluth in 1921. Information will be appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Malvina H. Malone, 1722 West Super Street, Duluth, Minnesota.

ST. GEORGE, WILLIAM.—Left Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1920. Married Janet Campbell in 1921. Please write to an old friend, Mrs. Frank Scrotto, 216 East Thirteenth Street, New York City.

JAGLA, H. B.—Last heard from in Winterset, Iowa, in 1922. Is twenty-three years of age, has blue eyes, brown hair, scar over right eye, and is six feet tall. A cook by trade. Write to R. J., care of this magazine.

WAGNER, or **HENACOMBE, JULIA.**—Last heard of in Chicago, Illinois. Formerly of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Please write to Dee M. Fairchild, 237 Bimni Place, Los Angeles, California.

NOBLE, DON.—Write to your old friend Dee, 237 Bimni Place, Los Angeles, California.

SANDOFOR, ANNIE, and **NANNIE MAE DIXON.**—Formerly of Arlington, Texas. Notify Earl R. Fain, Battery B, Sixtieth C. A., Fort William McKinley, Rizal, P. I.

TILDEN, ED.—Last known address, Muskegon, Michigan. Write to me at Alliance, Nebraska, P. O. Box 330. Steve.

GRIMES, MR. and **MRS.**—Parents of Mattie, James, and Charlie, who left them at the Belmont County Children's Home in Ohio. J. W. Grimes, Fieldbrook, California.

PHILIPS, M. S.—Was with me at the U. S. N. A. S., North Island, San Diego, California, and later was on the U. S. S. "New Mexico." G. W. Gedney, Denver General Hospital, Denver, Colorado.

DUNCAN, ROSS.—Short, dark complexion; baker by trade. Lived in Vancouver, British Columbia, in March, 1925. Kindly communicate with Criss, care of this magazine.

CLEMENS, CHARLES GORDON.—Left Tavistock, Ontario, in the summer of 1925. He is tall, has light hair and blue eyes, and is about eighteen years old. Write to your brother, P. W. C., 284 Franklin Street, Buffalo, New York.

BRADFORD, KEITH.—Six feet tall, heavy set, black hair and eyes. Due to fracture, cannot put left arm out straight. At one time did work as a construction engineer. Please communicate with your wife, Mrs. Keith Bradford, 105 Westminster Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

DRAPER, HARRY LEE.—About thirty-six years old, black hair and eyes. Last heard from ten years ago in Birmingham, Alabama. Please write to your sister, Mrs. H. A. Week, Apartment 26, 421 Leavenwerth Street, San Francisco, California.

GERTRUDE H.—I am very sorry and hope you will forgive me. Write to me, General Delivery, Oakland, California. Harry H.

RANKINS, JAMES ALANSIN.—Lived in Indianapolis, Indiana, between 1870 and 1875. Please write to your son, Bert Rankins, 2219 Live Oak Street, Dallas, Texas.

LEE.—Please write and let me know your address, or have you forgotten so soon? E.

REDDICK, ROY C.—Died in 1919. Was a well-known painter and paperhanger. Would like to hear from his relatives. Mrs. Roy C. Reddick, 820 Sherman Street, Denver, Colorado.

OAKES, HOUSTAIN.—Twenty-six years of age, blond hair and complexion, blue eyes, six feet tall. When last heard from was on board the "Herbert" in Cuba. Please write to your sister, Ruby P. Oakes, care of J. P. Hickey, Alton Park, Tennessee.

J. S. B.—I miss you so much and want to hear from you. Will be in Florida when you read this. Address care of J. D. G., Charleston, West Virginia. L. J. B.

TEXAS BILL.—Please write to me in care of this magazine. Butterfly Bea.

JERNIGAN, J. J.—Last heard from in Durham, North Carolina. Is about forty years old, has black eyes and hair turning gray, and is tall. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Ethel Thomas, Route 3, Box 49A, Pensacola, Florida.

MARABLE, ROBERT LEE.—Fifteen years of age, light hair and complexion, blue eyes, five feet three inches in height. Please write to your mother, Mrs. S. M. Marable, 316 South Parkway, Memphis, Tennessee.

D. B. G.—Received your letter through C. I am sorry and worried about you. Please come back or let me know where you are, at least. D.

BRADSHAW, HOWARD ("RED").—Please communicate with me, care of this magazine. R. W.

GILES, SERGEANT RAYMOND.—Was in San Antonio, Texas, and Portland, Oregon. Please communicate with Al Jordan of the Ninth Infantry, 817 Lafayette Street, South Bend, Indiana.

BELCHER, WILLIAM T.—Last heard of in Seattle, Washington, in 1923. H. J. Belcher, Route 7, Carrollton, Georgia.

NORMAND, STANLEY.—Daddy, please write to your only daughter, Mrs. Mabel Cabasier, 519 South Fourth Street, Vincennes, Indiana, as I have good news.

WROGG, LESTER.—Left Waterbury, Connecticut, in 1920 for Cleveland, Ohio. Please write to your friend, John Barry, 1103 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WHITACRE, ORVEL L.—Wounded July 29, 1918, while going over the top at Sergy, France. Was left in a trench, alive with a shrapnel in the side of one foot and one in his side above the hip. If he is living he would be thirty-two years old. Has light hair, blue eyes, and walks and talks like a girl. Please send any information to Mrs. Delia Emery, 1717 South Spring Street, Hartford City, Indiana.

BYARD, WILL, CHARLIE, or **DAVID.**—A dear friend would like to hear from them. Please write to Gertie, care of this magazine.

HOLCOMBE, BURT.—When last heard from was a salesman in Trenton, New Jersey. Was in motion pictures at one time under name of Harry B. Norman. Has White hair, partly bald, is six feet tall and sixty-four years of age. Any one knowing him please notify his brother, Charles Holcombe, 53 Webster Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

SCHULLY, CHARLES.—Please write to Alfred B. Hang, 498 California Street, Los Angeles, California.

BURT, FRED E.—Formerly of Lee, Maine. Returned with Company A, Fifth Infantry, from the Philippine Islands in the summer of 1902. His mother would like to hear from him. Address his sister, Mrs. Lula L. Bartlett, 63 Forest Avenue, Orono, Maine.

LEAH W.—What has occurred in the past will be forgiven. Please let me know where I can go and see you. J. W.

JOHNSON, MAURICE.—Swede, age thirty-five. Was in Chicago, Illinois, in 1920. Worked as engineer on Great Lakes boats. Will be grateful for any information. Georgie, care of this magazine.

J. A. O.—Please write me all about it. Come back to Hartford, Connecticut. I will consent to anything and promise never to interfere. I understand now. Joe.

SPRIGGS, ELMER.—Thirty-three years of age. Machinist by trade, six feet tall, stammers slightly. Has been gone two years. Your son and wife want you to come home. Mrs. Alma Spriggs, 402 South Mulberry Street, care of Mrs. Pheba Jeffery, Marshall, Michigan .

J. O. B., D. D. S.—Do you remember Rockcliffe, June 23, 1917? Write to me in care of this magazine. R. E. M., B.

CLIFTON, WILLIAM LLOYD.—Last heard of in San Antonio, Texas. Please write to your grandmother, Mrs. M. D. Hale, Alabama City, Alabama.

HAYNES, WESLEY A.—Last heard of in 1903 at Moodyville, British Columbia. Was also at Vancouver for several years. Any information would be gratefully received by his sister, Mrs. F. E. Lakamp, Meeker, Colorado.

CALVERT, CHESTER and MARGARET.—I would like to get in touch with my half brother and stepmother. Eugene Vergal Calvert, Gorham, Illinois.

GROGAN, CLARA ELLEN.—Sixteen years of age, gray eyes, brown hair. Any one knowing her please write to her sister, Isabel M. Grogan, Route 5, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

LANKFORD, GILES.—If alive is eighty-seven years old. Served in Civil War. Has scar across left cheek. Married Isabel Walker in about 1858. Any information will be appreciated by his son, William L. Lankford, Palacios, Texas.

EAKINS, EDDIE.—Seventeen years of age, light complexion. Please write to your mother and brother. Address Lizzie Wallace, Route 1, Box 99, Lomita, California.

JACQUES LE F.—I cannot believe you went away of your own accord. I need you and want you to write. Josephine.

HINERMANN, HARRY.—Twenty-three years of age, medium build, blue eyes, fair hair and complexion. Has been missing since the war. His mother is dying of a broken heart. Please send any information to his aunt, Mrs. Minnie Caldwell, 702 West North Avenue, N. S., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

FLOCKEN, WILLIAM.—Was a member of Company H, Thirteenth U. S. Infantry, in 1903. His old comrade and stage partner would like to hear from him. "Lew" Hawkins, 1842 Madison Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

JOHNSON, FRED C.—Light-red hair, blue eyes, tattooed on both arms and hands, age thirty-five. A cook by trade. Address Doctor T. W. Tatlow, Leedy, Oklahoma.

SIDUS, A. E.—Last seen in Detroit, Michigan. He has an artificial left hand and is about thirty-eight years old. Has two children, Harlem E., about sixteen years of age, and Sevilla M., about fifteen years of age. Address their aunt, Mrs. W. A. Smith, 524 North Ninth Street, Salina, Kansas.

BENTON, FRED.—Machinist by trade. Age thirty-six, born in England. Disappeared from Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1919 with his son, Henry, now ten years old. Please send any information to his wife, Mrs. Ann Benton, 1031 Somerville Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

LAVERY, J. J.—Tall, stout, blue eyes, light-red hair, ruddy complexion. Formerly of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Last heard of in Youngstown, Ohio. Bozo, please write to me at once. Jackie, care of this magazine.

BRADLEY, WILLIAM ELLIOTT.—Killed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, twenty-three years ago. He had two sisters, Mary and Helen, and four brothers, Orillo, Ernest, Herbert, and Fred. Would like to hear from any of them. His oldest daughter, Mrs. Jennie Ryan, Box 127, Center Rutland, Vermont.

CALAWAY, CARLENA, and **HOOVER FISHER.**—Carlena is fourteen years old, has light hair and blue eyes, and is slender. Hoover is short, slightly bald, has a scar under his right jaw, is about thirty-five years old, and stutters. Last heard of at Lockhart, South Carolina. The girl's father would like to get some trace of them. Willie Calaway, P. O. Box 352, Mooresville, North Carolina.

BORDEAU, IRENE.—Of Detroit, Michigan. Believed to be married. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Ethel Moore Ross, 704 East 106th Street, Los Angeles, California.

CLENDENNEN, JENNIE and HENRY L.—Not heard from for thirteen years. Address Mrs. Nannie E. Urban, 207 McClellan Street, Lead, South Dakota.

RAYMER, or **CHAMBERLAIN, ARTHUR G.**—Short, light complexion, blue eyes, age forty-five. His sister and father are ill and would like to hear from him. Last heard from in 1923 by his wife, at Marion, Illinois. Address Mrs. Ella Robertson, 1812 Helman Street, Nashville, Tennessee.

NOLFI, MARY.—Is in a home in Buffalo. Please write to your brother, Leonard Nolfi, 701 Harriett Street, McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania

BOGGS, BERTHA.—Last heard of in December, 1924, when working in a cafe on Third Avenue and Seventh Street, Huntington, West Virginia. Please write to Smithy, in care of this magazine.

CHARLIE.—Please come back to your wife at once. Goldie.

McKENZIE, DONALD.—Last heard of at San Diego, California, three years ago. Have news of interest. Write to your brother, Roderick McKenzie, 530A East Hill Street, Long Beach, California.

PICKETT, ALLIE.—Last heard of in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Please write to Howard L. Walker, Company F, Twenty-ninth Infantry, Fort Benning, Georgia.

SMITH, ZEKE, and **"RED" WILCOX,** and any others who served on the U. S. S. "Tacoma" from December, 1916, to December, 1919, please write to Herbert Green, 534 First Street, Piqua, Ohio.

MORGAN, EMMA MAY, or **MRS. E. M. HOWE.**—Your son George would like to hear from you or his sister Sadie. You can get in touch with him through Bob Morgan, H. D. Ranch, Montello, Nevada.

ROY.—Still with the same company. Have located Sister Alice. Please forget what has happened. Under any condition let me hear from you. Ev.

TILLEY, ROBERT.—Of Paducah, Kentucky, in 1913. Tall, dark hair. Write to J. B. Tilley, 400 Cate Avenue, Jonesboro, Arkansas.

McCARTY, MR. and MRS.—Their son, who was born January 18, 1901, in Michigan, was adopted when eighteen months of age by a family named Albright, of California. He would like to get some trace of his own mother and father. Howard Albright, 707 Haight Street, San Francisco, California.

BUSTER, ALBERT C.—About six feet tall and has blue eyes and curly black hair. Is between forty-five and fifty years old. Last heard of in California. Please write to your niece, Mary E. Chapman, 231 North Sixth Street, Pocatello, Idaho.

BEAN, RALPH ("SPIKE"), FRANK SILVIA, C. SMOKIE, HARRY H. MURPHY, J. H. MURPHY, "CURLY" O'BRIEN.—All worked for B. A. Jacobson at Stuyvesant. Please write to A. M. Z., P. O. Box 308, Degraff, Ohio.

WARRINGTON, BILLIE.—Who was with M. O'Neil Co. at Akron, Ohio, in 1920. Also any of the boys from Company B or Service Company, Second U. S. Infantry, write to an old buddy. Herbert B. Clark, Headquarters Battery, Third C. A. C., Fort MacArthur, San Pedro, California.

LAMBERT, LAWRENCE HAROLD.—Father is dead and mamma is all alone and very feeble. She longs to see you once more. Please write to Bant, at 604 North Birch Street, Creston, Iowa.

BIERNES, or BURNS, WILLIAM FRANCIS.—A Canadian soldier of the Forty-fourth Battalion. I have news of your mother and sister for you. Pete Samid Willoughby, Roland, Manitoba, Canada.

McELWAIN, GEORGE.—Left Eldorado Springs, Missouri, in 1916 for Fresno, California. Please write to an old friend, Emery Martin, Cambridge, Illinois.

MAG.—Please let me hear from you. Clem.

HANSON, OLAFSON.—Formerly of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. A carpenter by trade. Believed to be in Portland, Oregon. Although I do not remember you, I love you. Your daughter, Lillian Lovvick, 417 McDonough Street, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

CROCKER, ALONZO WAYNE.—Born in Cary, North Carolina, between forty-five and fifty years ago. Was a ball player and played with the Boston Nationals at one time. Please write to your half brother, S. M. Crocker, 321 West Martin Street, Raleigh, North Carolina.

DODD, ELK and HANNAH.—Last heard of at South Topeka, Kansas. Address G. H. Dodd, Ontario, Iowa.

McKEAL, IRVIN.—In Alabama three years ago. Please write to Glen A. Glidden, 215½ East Buffalo Street, Rawlins, Wyoming.

HILLMAN, WILL.—Please write to an old friend, as I have important news for you. C. S., care of this magazine.

HARTMAN, GEORGE WILLIAM.—About six feet tall. Both arms and shoulders tattooed. Blue eyes, dimple in chin. Last heard of in Pueblo, Colorado. His father is ill and would like to hear from him. William Hartman, 140 North East Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

CALDWELL, JAMES.—Twenty-eight years old, six feet tall, brown eyes and hair. Left Sanford, North Carolina, in March, 1925. News will be appreciated by his wife, Mrs. James Caldwell, R. F. D. 2, Lourys, South Carolina.

REINHEIMER, EMIL or HARRY.—His youngest sister, who has not seen him for about thirty-eight years, would like to hear from him. Mrs. Belle Linthecum, Box 33, Douthat, Oklahoma.

EDDIE B.—Write to me care of this magazine. I want you. Perry B.

HANSON, LIEUTENANT.—U. S. Guards stationed at Point Pleasant, West Virginia in fall of 1913, later at Camp Sherman, Chillicothe, Ohio. Write to Box 177, Shelby, Ohio.

OREM, JORDAN.—Was on police force in Norwood, Ohio, in 1917. Please write to Box 177, Shelby, Ohio.

J. B. C., MISS.—Please write to Willie and A., who are at Vinton, Louisiana. His sister.

GLASSER, MRS. ANNA, alias DOROTHY HILL.—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Is thirty-two years old, looks twenty-five. Short, blue eyes, light hair, fair complexion. Might be working as manicurist. Her parents and her two little girls need her. G. E. G.

H. L. R., TORONTO.—Please write to an old friend. Am all alone now. Annie C., care of this magazine.

TAGOY.—My father, Moses Tagoy, married a Cuban girl named Elizabeth, who died when I was one and a half years old. I was brought up by my father's people in the North. My brother, who was older, was brought up by my mother's people. I would like to find some trace of my brother and mother's relatives. Mrs. Rosetta Simmons, R. D. 3, Savannah, New York.

IVES, JOSEPH.—Do you remember Emily Delamater, at Saratoga about four summers ago? Please write to Emily Klein, 412 First Avenue, Watervliet, New York.

SMITH, VIOLA MILDRED.—Formerly of Baltimore, Maryland. Have been unable to find you. Please write to me at once. O. B. Eline, 140 Balto Street, Hanover, Pennsylvania.

CHARLIE.—M. is working. C. is fine. Both living with her mother. Please send me your address. Mamma Dell.

LLEWELYN, DAVID L.—Formerly electrician on the U. S. S. "Texas." Believed to be in Indiana. Write to your old shipmate, Frenchie. J. A. Trahan, U. S. S. "New York," Box 12, Care of Postmaster, New York City.

DEVES, JOE.—Formerly a fireman on the U. S. S. "Texas." Please write to your old shipmate, Frenchie. J. A. Trahan, U. S. S. "New York," Box 12, care of Postmaster, New York City.

BLEGEN, FRED J.—Honorably discharged from the U. S. Marines at Mare Island, California, in 1922. Is about five feet seven. Brown hair and eyes. Please write to mother. Nettie G. Blegen, 2523½ South Main Street, Los Angeles, California.

FULSOM, MAE.—Left home eleven years ago. Twenty-nine years old; short, black hair; brown eyes. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Ora Price, R. 1, Bushyhead, Oklahoma.

HAROLD B.—Please come back. You know I am helpless and cannot get work. Don't you realize how you wronged us? Write to dad. Rose.

EDWARDS, JACK F.—Write to your wife or mother at 172. Both anxious. J. F.

JOHNSON, R. H.—Please communicate through this magazine how and where you are. Ed.

HORNBACH, GOTLEIB.—Please forgive me and let me hear from you as I am heartbroken over your absence. I love you and want you to return. Your wife, care of this magazine.

VIC.—Won't you please send something for the babies? M. must have an operation. Please help me at once. Heartbroken R. E. H.

E. G.—Watch out that you don't get stranded. Nothing more I can do. Give address so I can write direct. G.

BOBBIE.—If you can understand and forgive, answer through this magazine. At least let me know how you are. F. J. E.

MARTINDALE, ERNEST.—Please come or write to Mary Jane, Box 16, Marienville, Pennsylvania.

SHELWITON, W. B.—Last heard of in Norfolk, Virginia. Any information will be appreciated by one who cares. M. E. S., care of this magazine.

CAIN, RAY S.—Last heard of in Mexia Oil Fields, Texas, in 1922. A tool dresser by trade. Please write to W., care of this magazine, and learn news to your advantage.

SNELL, EMMA.—Put an ad in this magazine, where I can write to you. Am in Eureka, California, on my way to New Zealand. Hope you are happy now. A. E. B.

KUHN, GEORGE.—Won't you please write to your mother again I still want to hear from you. Mrs. C. K., 4693 Mass Street, Gary, Indiana.

NAYLOR, WARREN S., HENRY, ARDELLA, and CARL, JR.—Age twenty, sixteen, thirteen, and nine years respectively. Their mother is worried over them. Address Vista Naylor, General Delivery, Topeka, Kansas.

VINCENT, SAMUEL and DOUGLAS.—Last heard of at Parkhill, Oklahoma, in 1917. Please write to your sister Mabel in care of Mr. Dave Brewner, R. F. D. 6, McKenzie, Tennessee.

LARSON, EDWIN.—Was adopted in Minot, North Dakota, by some people by the name of Zeiglar, who changed his name to Edward Zeiglar. His sister would like to find him. Mrs. Josephine Hayes, 4½ Main Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

JACK.—Received your letter of November 6th. All well. So worried about you. Dad, Mary, and James send their love. Write soon. Mother.

EMBREE, MAYNARD.—Last heard from at Charleston, South Carolina. Please write to R. Embree, 161 Highland Avenue, Yonkers, New York.

BURDINE, MRS. LILLIAN E.—Was living with a sister at Athens, Tennessee, in 1917. Address Mr. J. D. Mitchell, Ellicott City, Maryland.

GRIGGS, MYRTLE R.—Last heard of in Wyoming, New Jersey, in 1923. Please communicate with Paul E. Lee, Battery E, Seventy-sixth Field Artillery, Presidio of Monterey, California.

CASEY, HELEN.—Colored. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in 1924. Please write to your brother Clarence, Everettville, West Virginia.

ROBERTSON, D. F.—Medium height, brown hair, blue eyes. Last heard from in Ogallala, Nebraska. Please write to J. M. R., care of this magazine.

LAYER, MARIE or MARIGOLD WINTER.—Was adopted under false pretenses when three years of age from the Band of Mercy Club of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Layer, of Spaulding, Saskatchewan, whose address is now unknown. She has parents, sisters, and a home waiting for her. She is fifteen years of age. Address R. M. Winter, Noxon, Montana.

NELSON, GLADYS DOROTHY or PANSY WINTER.—Adopted by Mrs. Will Nelson, of Edmonton, under false pretenses. She is now thirteen years of age, and has parents, sisters, and a home waiting for her. Address R. M. Winter, Noxon, Montana.

STANLAKE, ROY L. or SMITH.—Formerly switchman on Pennsylvania Railroad. Address Helen Stanlake, 212 Reo Avenue, Lansing, Michigan.

Can You Guess This Man's Age?

See if You Can Tell Within 25 Years; The Author Couldn't; But He Stuck With Hobart Bradstreet Until He Revealed His Method of Staying Young

I USED to pride myself on guessing people's ages. That was before I met Hobart Bradstreet, whose age I missed by a quarter-century. But before I tell you how old he really is, let me say this:

My meeting up with Bradstreet I count the luckiest day of my life. For while we often hear how our minds and bodies are about 50% efficient — and at times feel it to be the truth — he knows *why*. Furthermore, he knows how to overcome it — in five minutes — and he showed me *how*.

This man offers no such bromides as setting-up exercises, deep-breathing, or any of those things you know at the outset you'll never do. He uses a principle that is the foundation of all chiropractic, naprapathy, mechano-therapy, and even osteopathy. Only he does not touch a hand to you; it isn't necessary.

The reader will grant Bradstreet's method of staying young worth knowing and using, when told that its originator (whose photograph reproduced here was taken a month ago) is sixty-five years old!

And here is the secret: *he keeps his spine a half-inch longer than it ordinarily would measure.*

Any man or woman who thinks just one-half inch elongation of the spinal column doesn't make a difference should try it! It is easy enough. I'll tell you how. First, though, you may be curious to learn why a full-length spine puts one in an entirely new class physically. The spinal column is a series of tiny bones, between which are pads or cushions of cartilage. Nothing in the ordinary activities of us humans stretches the spine. So it "settles" day by day, until those once soft and resilient pads become thin as a safety-razor blade — and just about as hard. One's spine (the most wonderfully designed shock-absorber known) is then an unyielding column that transmits every shock straight to the base of the brain.

Do you wonder folks have backaches and headaches? That one's nerves pound toward the end of a hard day? Or that a nervous system may periodically go to pieces? For every nerve in one's body connects with the spine, which is a sort of central switchboard. When the "insulation" or cartilage wears down and flattens out, the nerves are exposed, or even impinged — and there is trouble on the line.

Now, for proof that sublaxation of the spine causes most of the ills and ailments which spell "age" in men or women. Flex your spine—"shake it out"—and they will disappear. You'll feel the difference in *ten minutes*. At least, I did. It's no trick to secure complete spinal laxation as Bradstreet does it. But like everything else, one must know how. No amount of violent exercise will do it; not even chopping wood. As for walking, or golfing, your spine settles down a bit firmer with each step.

Mr. Bradstreet had evolved from his 25-year experience with spinal mechanics a simple, boiled-down formula of just five movements. Neither takes more than one minute, so it means but five minutes a day. But those movements! I never experienced such compound exhilaration before. I was a good subject for the test, for I went into it with a dull headache. At the end of the second movement I thought I could actually feel my blood circulating. The third movement in this remarkable SPINE-MOTION series brought an amazing feeling of exhilaration. One motion seemed to open and shut my backbone like a jack-knife.

I asked about constipation. He gave me another motion—a pecular, writhing and twisting movement—and fifteen minutes later came a complete evacuation!

HOBART BRADSTREET THE MAN WHO DECLINES TO GROW OLD

Hobart Bradstreet frankly gives the full credit for his conspicuous success to these simple secrets of SPINE-MOTION. He has traveled about for years, conditioning those whose means permitted a specialist at their beck and call. I met him at the Roycroft Inn, at East Aurora. Incidentally, the late Elbert Hubbard and he were great pals; he was often the "Fra's" guest in times past. But Bradstreet, young as he looks and feels, thinks he has chased around the country long enough. He has been prevailed upon to put his SPINE-MOTION method in form that makes it now generally available.

I know what these remarkable mechanics of the spine have done for me. I have checked up at least twenty-five cases. With all sincerity I say nothing in the whole realm of medicine or specialism can quicker re-make, rejuvenate and restore one. I wish you could see Bradstreet himself. He is arrogantly healthy; he doesn't seem to have any nerves. Yet he puffs incessantly at a black cigar that would floor some men, drinks two cups of coffee at every meal, and I don't believe he averages seven hours' sleep. It shows what a sound nerve-mechanism will do. He says a man's power can and should be unabated up to the age of 60, in every sense, and I have had some astonishing testimony on that score.

Would you like to try this remarkable method of "coming back?" Or, if young, and apparently normal in your action and feelings, do you want to see your energies just about doubled? It is easy. No "apparatus" is required. Just Bradstreet's few, simple instructions, made doubly clear by his photographic poses of the five positions. Results come amazingly quick. In less than a week you'll have new health, new appetite, new desire, and new capacities; you'll feel years lifted off mind and body. This miracle-man's method can be tested without any advance risk. If you feel enormously benefited, everything is yours to keep and you have paid for it all the enormous sum of $3.00! Knowing something of the fees this man has been accustomed to receiving, I hope his naming $3.00 to the general public will have full appreciation.

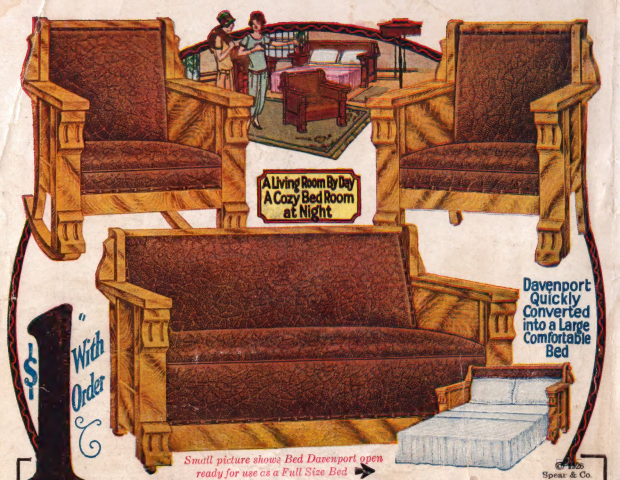
The $3.00 which pays for everything is not sent in advance, nor do you make any deposit or payment on delivery. Try how it feels to have a full-length spine, and you'll henceforth pity men and women whose nerves are in a vise!

HOBART BRADSTREET, Suite 7226,
630 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

I will try your Spine-Motion without risk if you will provide necessary instructions. Send everything postpaid, without any charge or obligation, and I will try it five days. If I find Spine-Motion highly beneficial I can remit just $3 in full payment; otherwise I will return the material and will owe you nothing.

Name .....

Address .....



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